



EC

2

# EC

## **Synopsis:**

In the distant future, after humanity's revival following an apocalyptic event, an inquisitive woman, a young man abandoned by his country, a youth seeking redemption and an isolated young prodigy meet by chance in a game promoted by a certain company. Tricked into running an Academy, the tale follows their lives and adventures in a world not their own.

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# A Helping Hand

\*yun\* \*yun\* \*yun\*

"-ly shit."

Niji and the surviving raid members appear as mosaic grains gradually taking their original forms, finishing their incomplete words.

\*fuu fuu fuu fuu\*

Rings of light particles rise repeatedly from the ground, surrounding the entire group. The series of light rings fade into nothing as they rise over the users' heads, giving each of them a variety of buffs. A [Scribe] along with a few [Soothsayer]s are busy receiving tips from surrounding players, sellings scrolls while providing healing over time spells as well as other services. Supply [Merchant]s are busy hawking their wares from their wagons right next to the [Scribe] and [Soothsayer]s and buying loot from the players, giving off the feeling of a relief caravan to help cope with a disaster. Two dozens tough-looking [Knight]s and [Paladin]s leading various groups of non-users surround the wagons from a distance, acting as security.

Healers and Support classes are a rarity within "Second Fantasia"; all the existing spells that are worthwhile within the healing classes, are heal over time [Spell]s, all instantaneous healing is temporary and can only be used as a stopgap measure to prevent death. The buffs provided by the Support classes cannot top the damage or tanking ability of the Combat classes or Debuff classes like the [Hex Mage] or [Shaman] who can amplify damage done by the party or weaken the

opponents with curses. It has become normal to forgo Healers and Support all together within a party to go with another tank or dps. Even with the lack of glamour, any offensive skills, the demands and adventurous appeals, a small minority of players stubbornly continues to play those classes.

A small boy approaches Niji and the group, with a smile on his face.

"Ah welcome! I'm glad you are all safe. Did everyone receive the blessings and healing?"

While still reeling in disbelief, Niji snap out from his stupor and acknowledges the boy with a nod.

"I'm surprised so many people came out, I guess the news of the entrance collapsing spread fast. But wow... all these people..." The boy spreads his arms toward the hundreds of people gathered at the entrance with a smile on his face and a glitter in his eyes.

\*goaro goaro\* \*ti ti ti\* \*goa\*

The faint sounds of earth being moved, stones being broken with tools and soil shifting fills the air as BGM, as a train of people enters and exits the caved in entrance of the dungeon.

[T/N: I don't think I need to say this... but just in case, BGM = background music.]

"If you need anything, come to the wagons! We've wagons full of supplies, we also buy loot and can even repair equipment." The boy gives the still bewildered group a wave before running off back to the wagons as a [Merchant] and his assistants start setting up a cooking pot."

Niji looks up at the sun as he wonders what on earth is happening and how the group still fighting the [Cerebus] is faring. They are obviously still alive, but the restrictions of the [Boss Dungeon] prevent any communications from the outside. He leads the survivors to the wagons as he ponders about the recent events.

\* \* \* \* \*

Till tilts her head upward at Rick with a slightly confused, questioning look. He quickly shakes his head to the unspoken accusation.

"Father? Is that really you?!" The young man with his eyes closed lifts his nose up and \*kunka kunka\* as he sniffs the air.

Another figure sleeping next to the sitting young man stirs at the noise. It quickly jumps to its feet when it spots the two of them.

"Sekn! Who are these children?!" The figure quickly grabs a nearby spear and gets into a stance. The two humans shifts their weight to get into a better position in preparation for a fight.

"Children? Isn't my father with them?" The young man remains seated, with his tail sweeping back and forth gently.

"Eh... sorry to interrupt, but... who are you people? Were you kidnapped by the [Cerebus]?" Rick takes a wild stab at the origin of the people in front of him while still remaining on guard.

"No... we are living here at the moment, the [Cerebus] have agreed to protect us for the meantime."

The girl and the youth turns to look at one another, making various facial expressions at each other before turning back.

"Umm.... our friends are still fighting with the [Cerebus], can we get them to stop first?"

\* \* \* \* \*

Several more dog-eared individuals woke up from their slumber and surround the two as they wait for Echo's return since he went out to stop the fight. Echo is the name of the caninoid that was next to Sekn. The various individuals armed themselves before forming a circle around the two, they give the two some distance with stern expressions, showing them that they are not trusted and that there's no escape should they start a fight. Despite the serious nature of the situation, all of them are sniffing the air intently, with their tails sweeping. Sekn walks to a nearby chair with his eyes still closed before sitting down.

"Ow, ow, ow, owwww, I'm sorry okay? Please let go!"

Everyone in the room except for the two humans goes stiff, their irises focus and unfocus. The moment Bell walks into the cavern while pinching one of Echo's ear, several individuals throw away their weapons before running and jumping onto her with their tails waving.

"What the-?!" She quickly lets go of Echo's ear and starts jumping off the walls and ceiling as she tries to get away from being dogpiled.

An exhausted looking Kun walks forward, bringing up the rear, watching the little game of cat and mouse (or dogs and cat in this case) with amusement.

\*kon\* \*kon\* \*kon\* \*kon\* \*kon\*

"Cut it out!"

\*hihi hihi hihi\*

Bell knocks the ones chasing her in the head, causing them to back off while whimpering.

\*koho\*

"Have some manners." Sekn gives off a soft warning, causing all the ones that were chasing Bell to droop their tail and ears. On the other hand, his tail, along with others that stood and watch, are all waving around happily. Turning his head toward the felinoid, "are you perhaps a citizen of the Pent Kingdom?"

\*haa haa\*

Bell is taken aback while catching her breath, she was already tired from riding the [Cerebus], dodging the caninoids drained whatever strength she had left. All eyes, except those of her companions, are on her. She shakes her head.

"Did you take in citizens of Pent? There are definitely the smell of other demihumans on all of you!" Desperation seeps into the sitting young man's voice as he talks.

"Um... wouldn't that be De'muel, Mak'ra, Dosnak and the rest of the kids?"

"... De'muel?" Sekn and all the caninoids' shift their focus from Bell to the black-haired young man in the back.

"That's named after the God of Prosperity right?"



"Definitely!"

"And Ra of Mak! There must be survivors!"

Excited chatter fills the cavern as the party of four gathers.

"Till, who are these people? Why were they trying to jump me?" Bell is still on guard, being cautious to leave no opening while retrieving her halberd.

\*koho\*

The young man on the chair coughs lightly to silence his fellows, "excuse us for our bad manners, we've been... stuck here for years, and we thought you were a survivor from our kingdom. A proper introduction is in order. My name is Sekn, son of Miran, former commander of the combined 4th Lupine Company and 2nd Manze Combat Engineers and Supply Regiment from the Pent Kingdom." The young man stands up before giving the group a bow, while the rest of the caninoids follow suit. "Do forgive me for not looking at you properly, as you can see, I'm blind."

"Um... sorry, I helped raise those kids, they were all orphans that were found around a certain forest. They definitely aren't from the Pen..." Till freezes mid sentence. "Headmistress...?! You are the people that headmistress was looking for?!" She reaches into her garb before clutching the amulet tightly.

"What's the name of this headmistress?!" Sekn asks in earnest.

"Alfina, Alfina Defaye." A bittersweet voice announce the name lovingly.

"Aunt Defaye's alive?!" All the caninoids' tails goes into overdrive with

their ears perked up, causing a minor draft in the chilled cavern. Smiles spread across their faces as Sekn happily asks the question.

"No, she recently passed away."

The mood dampens rapidly.

"But what about my father? I can feel that's he's here right now, where you are."

An awkward silence follows. Till looks at herself before looking around her, her eyes open sharply as she realizes a certain possibility. She releases her hand in shock, looking at the amulet intently. She bites her lips for a while before pressing her lips together to form a thin, flat line on her face. She takes off the amulet before approaching Sekn, grabbing one of his hands and pressing the amulet into it before backing away.

"What..." Sekn delicately traces the amulet with his fingers before resting on the crystal embedded in the center. A teardrop rolls down the man's face as the reality of it hits him. He had expected his father to die, every single last one of the 7 Great Magicians said as much. When he sensed his father's presence and with finding out that Alfina Defaye survived until just recently, it gave him hope. But his farfetched expectation doesn't mesh with reality, the only reason the well-liked [Quartermaster] can be felt at all is due to the [Spatial Storage] spell that has been casted onto the crystal. Absentmindedly, he repeats the well rehearsed phrase.

qpdbeqdb ? Y ● , lll E> lD ? : , E ? :

All expressions disappear from the young man's face as he falls onto the chair. Everyone looks on as he continues to sit there in a daze. Kun starts looking around in the meantime with «Hawkeye», inspecting the beds and the people still sleeping on them, the food supply, the set of stairs, the walls, visible equipment, everything.

"Where did you find this?" The dog-eared young man's tone is completely flat and cold.

"It's a memento made by my younger brother from something Alfina owned..."

More silence follows.

"Eh, Sekn was it? Correct me if I'm wrong, you guy have been living here by robbing supplies from us immortals and adventurers right? And I think you guys are using something similar to hibernation to extend the supplies as well as some limited farming with fungus. I'm guessing there's about 300-400 people in this cavern?"

The caninoids turn their attention back to Kun with a sharp glint in

their eyes. Sekn scrunches his brows, "what about it? And what did you mean by 'immortals'?"

Till walks up and gives a more detailed history of the last few years, since she had been a user the longest, and is better equipped to explain. She talks about how the immortals came to be named immortals, the views held by Alfina in regards to them. The various major events that had happened on Zrewheig and personal events with Alfina since meeting her. Her composure and point drifts away ever so slowly, taking time to talk about things Alfina had said that's completely unrelated, reliving her memories. Like how she found De'muel and others in the forest, how the little shelter became an academy, how Alfina turned the forest into a giant formation to protect the academy, how birds were accidentally pushed out of the forest, how they had to import bees and such to help with pollinating and spreading seeds since the birds left, etc... Some of the gathered people shifts nervously while others simply smile at their own memories. No one interrupted her however, until Till stops speaking on her own.

Sekn and some of his comrades have a faint smile on their face when she finished.

"What I was trying to say is that... things aren't going to be good if you people stay here. The [Cerebus] is strong... but it's just a matter of time before it's defeated and killed. This is a [Dungeon], meaning that there's a reward for conquering it."

"Right, the other [Dungeon]s reward the people that managed to conquer and control them. Out of the two conquered so far, one produces high quality silk in large quantities while the other has a unique type of food that only grows within the [Dungeon] that is said to be the food version of an orgasm."

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\*kon\*

"Food version of nirvana, you dumbass."

Sekn's and Echo's faces turn pale immediately. "What happened to the ones that were defending the [Dungeon]s?"

"They were killed each time someone else tried to take it from the group of people that was controlling the [Dungeon]."

"Excuse us a moment." Bell moves away from the group, walking past a few of the people that encircled them, beckoning the rest of her group to follow her before activaing the [Chat Room] command.

One by one, the group walks into the section where Bell is at while she enables each of them to listen in.

"Let me start, I don't think these are bad people. Hell, I don't even want to be fighting the [Cerebus] again after that display with Echo."

"Yeah... it's like a giant puppy the way it reacts to Echo." Kun crosses his arms and smirks.

"These are the people Alfina was looking for, for so long too... to think they were only a country apart."

"No offense Till, but that Alfina of yours scare me." The youth shivers as he recalls his past experience with her while the girl pouts at him. "But on the other hand, the academy was built by her, and likely has some meaning that we don't know about."

The catwoman lifts an eyebrow, the way her friend continues to make sense recently still confuses her at times. "What are you suggesting?"

"Look, these people need a place to stay. The [Forest of Illusions] is freaking huge, let them stay with us. We get a small army to help defend the Academy, and likely help us expand the Academy. They get to live somewhere else, have a proper base, and meet people that they are obviously dying to meet. Just look at how they reacted to Bell." The felinoid takes a step back instinctively with her tail raised. "It's a win-win situation."

"Supplies will be a problem though."

"We can shift the money saved for our expansions and use it to get them supplies, if they are willing to help expand the Academy, it's no different than paying them to do it for us."

"I think headmistress and everyone back in the Academy would like that~"

\* \* \* \* \*

"What do you think of these people, Echo?"

"I'm not sure if we can trust them, what if they are putting on an act?"

"I doubt that... especially that little girl. Do you know what this is?" Sekn holds up the amulet that he was given by Till.

"It's just a wooden amulet that has your father's scent on it, no?"

"Look closer." Sekn hands over the amulet to his second-in-command.

The dark-haired older man inspects the amulet carefully, his face of concentration gives way to one of astonishment. "How can a piece of

wood and crystal be joined so seamlessly? ... Wait, there's magic within the crystal as well?"

"That amulet was made with extreme care, it's a piece of wood that's made to fit the crystal completely, I can barely even detect the parts where the pieces are joined together. And that crystal? It holds a large portion of our Kingdom's [Artifact]s, my father casted [Spatial Storage] on it at one point and must have shoved everything inside."

The older man nearly drops the amulet from the shocking revelation, fumbling it around in the air before diving on to the ground to keep it safe. Others around him go wide-eyed before standing at attention. After carefully returning the amulet to Sekn, Echo gives himself a \*taa taa\* pat down to remove the dust and looks at the group of four people that are having a discussion of some sort.

"These children... are likely not lying and they are not blinded by greed. This amulet obviously means a lot to her, yet she's able to give it to me without asking for anything."

Echo opens his mouth, about to give a reply. He closes his mouth right away since the children are walking back toward them. 3 of them form a line behind the blond youth.

"We just talked it out. You guys want to live with us?"

\*doka\*

Bell give him a swift kick in his ass.

"Ow!" He rubs his butt a bit as the others look on before giving off a \*goho\* and straightens himself.

"As the 2nd Headmaster of Zinia Academy, I invite you, your company and regiment, to reside with us until such time that you feel you want to leave. Food and amenities will be provide for initially, but you'd have to be self-sustaining after a 3 month period. You will be required to help out the Academy during your stay, additionally, we are willing to take in the [Cerebus] if necessary."

All the caninoids shift their weight nervously, with their tails waving and ears twitching.

Unexpectedly, Sekn lowers himself on one knee, with the amulet in one hand. "I hereby accept your hospitality and goodwill, as a commanding officer of the Pent Kingdom and I swear upon my body and indestructible soul that your kindness will be repaid. I shall be held responsible for any and all indiscretion by those I'm in charge of. Should the day come where I fail to uphold my words, may I be impaled by a thousand spears, suffer the curse of pain unimaginable, with my orifices bleeding, devoid of all but agony."

\*ziii\*

A faint brand briefly wraps itself around the kneeling Sekn.

"Did the commander just do a {Blood Oath}?"

"Shit, when was the last time a commanding officer did that?!"

"Guys, protocols, protocols!"

All the remaining caninoids form a square formation behind their commander and salute.

The party of four look at each other, obviously not expecting such a development.

"I only have one request, something that only those that are in your



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positions are able to do." The blind young man stands up with a faint, conspiring smile on his face.

# EC?

“The Grand Record” from Han-Koryo, “The Journey” of the Uzbek Emirate, “Pathfinders” in Chipewyan Confederation’s Oral Tradition, “Amazonian Accords” by the Peruvian Freestate, “The Dragon Kings’ Chronicles” from the Kingdom of Bhutan, and many others compiled during the Age of Chaos, after the fall of civilization, all stated that there’d been an abundance of timber. It was said that well before the fall, nations across the planet went on a massive reforestation effort. These forests were later cut down to use as fuel and raw material to stave off the inevitable collapse of their lifestyles due to the Auroras. This caused a major chain reaction, causing farmland to erode, desertification advanced unimpeded, flood and drought became more common, the formation of deadly storms started, the loss of animal habitats -especially those of pollinators and zoochory species- and other natural disasters led to deaths at an unprecedented scale measured in the billions. This led to extreme protective measures for resource management enacted by various governments as geopolitical powers stabilized during the Age of Recovery, measures that are still active to this day as wood remains the sole primary fuel necessary to produce any and all metal products on the planet.

[T/N: Zoochory is the spread of seed via animals]

Ever since timber became a restricted commodity, all glass, metal, and ceramic products became luxury items. Advances in the reinvention of science were slow and deliberate, with special attention toward energy production and electronics followed by medicine, agriculture and engineering. Smiths and artisans were rare as raw materials were rarer still, but the few that were able to become smiths were highly praised and sought after as they were often the best of the best, specializing in

their chosen field since wastage is unacceptable. This became the cornerstone of all subsequent manufacturing industries all the way to the present, where every product is still handcrafted by skilled workers.

Following the Age of Recovery came the Age of Sail, where countries had claimed stakes in most parts of the world. Since there were often conflicts on land, trade via ships became ever more enticing. Due to the sheer amount of resources necessary to construct the ships, treaties forbidding naval warfare became common place within various regions of the world. Like with wood, resource management policies regarding marine environments were extremely protective, even at the expense of human lives. Relying on sails, ships reconnected the world. Different cultures met and occasionally clashed, but knowledge was shared and descendants of lost civilizations discovered one another. These individuals were tasked with preserving and guarding relics or knowledge passed down from their ancestors from before the Age of Chaos. Many of these descendants would eventually secretly meet with one another, trying to rediscover their past, their families' inherited destiny, to quench their curiosity, among a myriad of other reasons. The richer ones among them would provide funds for others, forming one of many independent research groups. These groups would unwittingly end the Age of Sail, with the world being none the wiser.

The first major breakthrough was the solar cell, although it was extremely inefficient, it eliminated the need for wood as fuel for lighting. The researchers who discovered this technology shared it with the rest of the world, seeing a more prosperous tomorrow due to it. They were both right and wrong. The technology would eventually lower the value of otherwise prohibitively costly wood, allowing more products to be produced across the board.

This, of course, meant that governments started to construct massive

amounts of siege engines, trying to take over other countries and fight for resources. The first to move was the Alman Theocracy who tried to launch a surprise attack 20 years ago against the Republic of California and the Pacific Nomocratic Federation. Fortunately, the Saska Confederacy warned the PNF via its trade channels, who in turn warned RoC, about the imminent danger. Similar events unfolded in Asia, Africa, and Europe.

[T/N: Alman Theocracy owns most of the modern day US midwest, PNF consisting of the Pacific Northwest and Yukon, Saska Confederacy owns US northern states, Canadian prairie provinces, NWT + Nunavut. The map is so very rough, I am not sure if I'll bother remaking it.]

Naval warfare happened for the first time when a certain nation secretly created a naval fleet numbering in the hundreds, it claimed that it was a trading fleet while others have claimed it was a combat fleet. Various nations surrounded this island nation in the Indian Ocean with their vessels and defeated its fleet after a savage, month-long war of attrition. It was later confirmed that the fleet was to be used for transporting troops and had plated hulls. Had the ships been properly manned, the coalition would have likely been defeated.

Despite the ongoing wars, the world prospered. Food became more abundant due to trade, simple medicines that were never in certain locations became available, the exchange of ideas brought forth many innovations. But having learned from the lesson on sharing technology, governments and independent groups alike became secretive.

\* \* \* \* \*

A lanky, black-haired, middle-aged man wearing a lab coat is walking briskly down a white hallway, numerous workers in similar outfits

move to the side as he walks past, nodding towards him in acknowledgement. This man is well known as someone who doesn't care for formality.

Turning a corner, the man abruptly opens a door marked "Chief Executive Office", marching into the room and approaches the second door, ignoring the protesting secretary.

\*BAN\*

The man slams the door open as he enters the personal office of the company's CEO. "Sir! Madam Yu made a breakthrough!"

An older man with sharp features, slightly sunken eyes, and gray, receding hair snaps his head up at the intruder. Before turning back toward the small camera mounted on the computer in front of him.

"I'm sorry ladies and gentlemen, something important just came up. If you are interested in doing business with us, you can contact my secretary here with your proposals. Good day."

"Wait, we were prom-"

The man gets up from his chair after disconnecting from the conference call, using the the edge of his large mahogany desk to push himself up. He walks briskly toward the waiting man at the door with a sharp look in his eyes. "Which lab is she in now?"

"Lab 2 in the 3rd building, I already got a car waiting for us downstairs."

The older man walks past the first man.

"I'm sorry, sir! I tried to stop him. He just barged in and-"

A flustered looking woman in her 30s tries to explain herself.

The older man massage his brows with his thumb and index finger, "are you new here? You don't stop **any** of our researchers that tries to enter my office, got it? Get HR to book training for yourself. Which idiot brought you in here without basic training?"

The woman opens and closes her mouth in quick succession trying to respond, the CEO ignores her by walking out the room with the man in labcoat following right behind.

"Good work, what's the breakthrough?"

"She managed to get a new interface working, but that isn't why I came to get you."

"Then what did you come and get me for?"

"She recovered some records, one of them happens to be A/V to be exact."

"So a video then?"

The two men turn a different corner from whence the researcher came from and board an elevator.

"Yes, the team is trying to decompress it into a higher quality state as we speak."

"And the other records?"

"Never seen before topological reference, weather patterns, land surveys, nautical charts, bestiary entries."

Silence reigns as the older man digests the new information. He makes a stoic face as he walks out the elevator after it stops. "So you are saying, there's cartographic information of new lands." Pressing his fingers onto his temples to massage them, he \*fuuu\* out a long sigh

before heading to the waiting white, 4 seat, open-air buggy with a windshield in the front and numerous solar panels on the sides and top. The buggy waits silently in the front of the building, one of many 6-story tall stone buildings using the latest architectural engineering inside the company's compound.

[T/N: I'm assuming it's something like a golf cart] [ED: Sounds more like a Lunar Rover]

"Yes, it appears we've confirmation that Zrewheig is only one of several continents on Amoatlz."

"I see..." The older man makes a grim expression as he boards the buggy at the back, holding his hand up to block the sun that's glaring down at them from the cloudless blue sky. He moves onto the seat further in to make space for his companion. "What's the coverage rate of Zrewheig itself?"

The researcher boards the buggy as well, taking his seat before \*tan tan\* on the side of the buggy to get the driver's attention. "3rd building." The driver turns back toward him while holding up 3 fingers, to which the researcher nods to. The driver soundlessly starts the vehicle, driving onto the small path dedicated to this type of vehicle. "According to the latest survey, about 32% of the continent is explored."

"It has been over two years now... why is the progress so slow even with our market penetration?"

"It seems users are comfortable where they are, and there are areas that are difficult to explore as well. There are dedicated raiding guilds, but most of them have been fighting over the 2 conquered dungeons." The middle-aged man kneads his brows in concentration. "There are a few exploration guilds as well, but they are primarily being funded by

the merchant guilds. The issue seems to be survivability.”

“Wasn’t there a group that’s working on a Compensated Weapon Proficiency system?”

“There’s a snag, quite a few of these masters are refusing to cooperate.”

“Didn’t I say to use everything possible to get their help?”

“We tried giving them massive amounts of money, even tried luring them via their family and disciples, but few of them were moved by it.

\*fuuuuuuuuuuuu\* The CEO breathes out a long sigh.

“They are masters, Alan. They wouldn’t be masters if they could be tempted by material goods. Invite them to one of our facilities, bring a mobile unit to them if we have to. Have them experience it firsthand, most of these people are old men, they will be ecstatic to put into practice their polished arts with a body in its prime.”

\*pa\*

The researcher hammers one hand into the other’s palm. “Right! Damn it! How did I miss that?!”

“I know I told you to keep a low profile, but get a few marketers and PR guys to help you out if you need to. We are researchers, we are not made for HR.”

“Yes, I should do that. What should we do with the current data though?”

“Release it into the TIES system, it’s not like the users can reach the level of masters overnight.”



“Got it. Also, various governments are requesting some of our R&D techs... hell, I think 2 of them are willing to declare war to get them from us.”

“Which governments?”

“Alman Theocracy in North America and the Zulu Stratocracy in Africa.”

\*ahahaha\*

“Both of them will take weeks to get here by ships! Come on, Alan, there are some jokes that don’t need to be said.” The older man takes a deep breath before resuming. “Have the Pacific Nomocratic Federation and the Republic of California keep an eye out for the Almans, give them some of the newer farming techs for the help. As for the Zulu, have our branches in the region keep an eye on them. Those sail ships of theirs can’t hope to outmatch our outboard motors.”

The duo continues their back and forth until their arrival at the Leviathan research building number 3, in the research district where different facilities are onsite: solar, hydro, and steam turbine power plants, farms, water treatment, basic manufacture, different types of storage facilities, and multiple redundancy systems, the site can operate for 6 months in complete isolation on supplies alone.

\* \* \* \* \*

“Madam. Madam? Madam!”

A bespectacled middle-aged woman jumps in surprise. “Sorry, give me a moment, I’ll be right with you.” The woman looks at the monitor a little longer, in it are a man and a woman hooked up to IVs, laying still, as they had for the last 20 years. The woman strains her lips for a moment before turning it off and walks toward the young woman that

was trying to get her attention earlier.

“Madam, we artificially touched up the existing video, we think the data itself is corrupted, so this is the best we can do.”

“Thanks, tell everyone to take a break after transferring the video to the conference room.” The woman turns and heads for the door to the hallway before stopping abruptly, touching her forehead with her fingers before turning back. “Let everyone know they did a great job, and that the drinks are on me. It’s in the usual spot.” She reaches into a side pocket of her labcoat before tossing a key at the young woman before leaving with a wink.

\* \* \* \* \*

“I’m sorry, please take care of her.”

I nod solemnly before bringing my sword down on my kneeling friend, cleanly severing his head with my sword. The head with a mess of brown hair rolls past my feet on the mossy, stone floor, with a tired, sad smile on its face. The body collapses forward afterward, twitching for a moment before staying still.

“I’m sorry to have you do all this.” The aging man with graying hair gives the corpse a quick salute before readying himself, clasping an orb with a white light that doesn’t shine next to his heart with both hands.

“It’s an honour, my liege.” I press my lips together as I hold back my tears.

“By my blood, I renounce my rule. By my body, I renounce my legacy. By my soul, I renounce my essence. With the hands that snatched fate, I return it. With the blade that unites, I enforce it. With the shield that protects, I endure it. With my ash as the bond of the worlds, may the infinity be endless, may the cycles be free.”

I thrust my sword through the orb and my king's heart in one stroke. The man smiles softly before turning white and into the form of a dragon with its wings spread before scattering into particles of light in all directions.

\*poro poro\*

Tears flow from my eyes, dripping rhythmically on the ground. I wipe my face with my sleeve before picking up the head on the floor, muttering a quick apology.

\*ta... ta... ta...\*

I slowly walk out of the ruins, sword in one hand, head in another. Sunlight blinds me as I enter into the courtyard just outside the ruins.

*Was the sun ever that bright?*

“YOUR EMPEROR IS DEAD AS IS YOUR EMPIRE! I SHALL PERSONALLY DESTROY EVERY LAST STRONGHOLD, EVERY FORT THAT THE EMPIRE HOLDS! SHOULD THE DAY COME WHERE I FAIL TO UPHOLD MY WORDS, MAY I BE IMPALED BY A THOUSAND SPEARS, SUFFER THE CURSE OF PAIN UNIMAGINABLE, WITH MY ORIFICE BLEEDING, DEVOID OF ALL BUT AGONY.”

\*zii\*

A large red brand encircles me before constricting itself into my body after my roar, I feel a small sensation like being lightly burnt before it fades away.

The soldiers look at me in confusion, obviously having never seen the brand before. I throw the head up into the air before incinerating it with a «Fireball».

\*WWWWWWWWWWAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA\*

“YOU TRAITOR!”

“FOR THE EMPIRE!”

I ready my second sword as I prepare for the screaming soldiers’ onslaught.

\*sha.. sha... SHHHHHAAAAAA\*

...

...

...

The first person experience record ends as statics eat into it, the image and sound flickers a few times before being completely filled with static. The three people sitting around a conference table takes off their headsets and quietly set them onto the table.

\*DAAAAN!\*

“Damn! Another useless video!” The CEO hammers his right hand down onto the table.

“No... there’s something there...”

“Yeah, Xin Yue is right, there’s definitely something similar...” The lanky man kneads his brows before putting the headset back on. The

other two close their eyes, going through the images in their head. “Wait! Here! Go to the part where he’s walking out of the ruins and a moment just before the sunlight hits.”

The two quickly put their respective headsets on.

“Okay, what am I looking for?”

“On the fallen column on the left hand side, Hector.”

“... those are just runes, no?”

“Wait... damn, Alan, you’ve some crazy good eyes. Hector, they are runes alright. Runes that we really never got to see anywhere else, runes that were in the first video where they failed to log out.”

The room becomes silent following those words.

“Is that English...? EC... Is there even a word like that?”

[T/N: EC is in English in the RAW, in case you are wondering]

\* \* \* \* \*

Home » Forum » Discussion » Dungeon

Topic: Barghest Dungeon  
Subject: CONQUERED!

Greetings everyone! And of course oh leaderships of [Dawn’s Moonlight] and [Monochrome Blades]! We hope Keely a speedy recovery and that he had his kids already, and do avoid spicy food Tabeus!

As most of you know, the two guilds that were fighting for the Barghest Dungeon disbanded due to unethical behaviours, ah screw being diplomatic, the leaders were assholes that sacrificed newbs just to skip a certain section of the dungeon! They were even keeping the regular guild members in the dark! Well boohoo you bastards, now EVERYONE knows.

Um, right, this dungeon's reward is a little different from the other two conquered ones! How so? Come join us at [Atonement] and find out! We had some help from a group of... very strange and powerful people the last time, but I'm sure we can do it on our own in the near future! If you are familiar with the NPCs in Feia or Sardor, you might have heard of them. The Little Witch, the Cat Amazon, the Fertility God and the Prince of Destruction, apparently they are running an Academy and they are accepting students.

Anyhow, come join us and chase those bastards away from all the dungeons! Also, don't worry about conquering the dungeon, we don't care who controls it! I did say it's different from the others!

Posted Sept 16, 114 NC 17:13

Subject: None

You mean to say those two guilds failed after fighting for it for so long?! HA!

Posted Sept 16, 114 NC 17:14

Subject: None

Suits those f\*\*\*s right!

Posted Sept 16, 114 NC 17:16

.....

# Expansion

It had been almost a month since the group invited the dog-eared ones to the Academy. The area around the recently cleared grounds were quickly developed into farmlands with the help of the supply regiment. Temporary tents were used for a short duration as the crews cleared more land and used the resulting timber and raw materials to construct longhouses for lodging and various facilities like a granary, storage warehouse, carpentry shop, shooting range, barracks, a communal bathhouse and even a cafeteria. Kun interjected himself early on, providing advice on spacing between the buildings as he's doing something similar in the real world. Needless to say, the Academy was a beehive of activity, with students learning all they can from the newly arrived group while helping out.

[T/N: The cleared grounds were mentioned to be behind the workshop, next to the farming fields in Vol 1 Chapter 7]

The group and the company had to sneak out via the hidden passage they made into the dungeon after they packed their equipment. It was a sight to behold as everything was dismantled, even the stone-beds, and carried out. Some of the larger items simply disappeared as the group didn't see any of the caninoid carrying them. It was already dark by the time they reached the entrance of the limestone cavern, the company suddenly stopped, dropped their packs and thrust their palms into the ground. The group had prepared to fight right there and then, but gray, cattle-sized, shaggy-haired dogs with hooves appears from the ground. The group could only look on as the company loaded their baggage onto these [Gray Cadejo]s. They made quick travel toward the hideout in the [Field of Ashes], with Bell and Kun



logging out midway due to the time.

The company broke down when they reached the hideout and the group of students appeared. Some were smiling, others cheered, many cried and hug. The students were bewildered, but also happy to see so many adult demi-humans. Isnic led the company to the Academy as Till and Rick also logged out.

There was a small incident at the **Sardonian** border where garrisoned troops quickly rushed out to confront them. Due to the orderly manner and size of the traveling group deep in the night, the garrison had thought there was an invasion and sounded the alarm. The matter was quickly settled when Isnic identified herself and showed the captain of the guard the 4 vessels resting on a wagon being pulled by the [Cadejo]s. Isnic hinted that these people were important friends with the former headmistress, she smiled while giving the captain some bags of trail mix and some booze courtesy of Echo before heading off with a few of the students that were also stationed there. Bell would've been proud with her application of the "Carrot and Stick" approach had she been logged in.

The company broke down again when they reached the academy a few days later, seeing the students and the work they had accomplished. There was much rejoicing with a little festival, Kun was worked to the bone preparing his "exotic" foods, although it wouldn't be wrong to say that he enjoyed himself as well, with a helping hand frequently rotating in and out as the rest of the demihumans partied. Everyone, especially Sammy, had a great time. The next few days, the caninoids got right to work, it seems they have a company motto: "Work hard, play hard".

\*kokko kokko kokko\*

“Are you guys sure about this...?”

“What do we have to lose?”

“How about my dignity?”

“Just shut it, Rick. Not like it’s worth much anyways.”

“These little ones are cute too~!”

“Eh... Till, I have to ask, how are these things cute?” The blonde-haired youth points at the sloth-like creature with a pointed beak. “What kind of creature are they for crying out loud?! Why are they clucking like chicken but look like a monkey with a beak for a mouth?!”

“They are cute cause they are cute~” The little girl proceeds to gently pet the creature that’s in her arms.

Bell, Rick and Till are currently inside an enclosed area, custom built to be a coop. Although it’s called a coop, it is still a good 20 meters tall with plenty of trees inside the 50m by 50m structure. Poles were erected on the corners, with wooden boards surrounding the lower 5 meters of so. A net of ropes act as the upper walls and ceiling of the coop, there to keep the animals from getting out as well as a way to feed them. There are a dozen or so [Namakemono Chicken]s within the coop, they are brown-coloured with a sloth-like body, feathered, wing-like arms and a chicken-like beak. The lone rooster has a vibrant crown of green and blue and is significantly smaller than the females. It instead has razor-sharp claws and a hooked-beak more typical of a

raptor and is unable to climb, but is capable of limited flight. If one isn't an expert, no one would've noticed that they belong to the same species.

[T/N: Just to clarify, ??? - ????????? is Sloth (Namakemono - the animal) Chicken. ??/????? is the descriptor, and unlike the english word "sloth", it doesn't have an alternate meaning. So I used namakemono to avoid having the mistaken image of "Lazy Chicken" for it.]

These are low level creatures not in the Total Immersion Entertainment System's (Second Phantasia's OS, as references in the previous chapter) internal Bestiary nor is there are any information on any of the sites on the internet. According to the lieutenant supply officer that went shopping with the supplies group days earlier in Feia, these creatures were commonly hunted in swamp mangroves and wetland forests everywhere where they were originally from. They sleep for most of the day, only to jump and glide toward their food of choice and either eat it on the spot or bring it back to their nest to eat it there. The males are known as Terror Birds since they would jump up and slash at any adventurers that happen to startle it. The ones here are slightly different, but she recognized them at the bushmeat stall right away. She quickly convinced Bell and Till who were leading the shopping group at the time to purchase all the live ones from the various shops who agreed.

Although they have a kind of bland, delicate flavour, it's not the reason why the lieutenant wanted them. It is their eggs that she was after. There are no [Namakemono Chicken] farms within the region since no one knew where the males were, so they ended up as bushmeat within the local market. Their eggs are famous for being highly nutritious due to the fact that these creatures don't move a lot, thus diverting the energy other animals would use for movement into reproduction.

\*kokko\*

“Get down, Rick.” The youth hesitantly kneels down in front of the fe-linoid’s glare.

\*kokko kokko kuu\*

Till gently places the [Namakemono Chicken] in her arm on the Youth’s head. The birdlike thing lazily flaps its arms to balance itself before it settles on Rick’s head.

“How long do I have to do this for?”

“How should we know? How long did you need for those Feian elders?”

“Just an instant since I gave them all a quick headbutt.”

“Then do that here~”

\*fuuuuuu\* \*Kokkkkoooooooooooo?\*

Rick breathes a long sigh before suddenly dropping down a little and jumping up, lightly headbutting the creature on his head before it glides harmlessly away onto the floor, clucking all the while. This is repeated for all the female [Namakemono Chicken]s. It is finally the male’s turn...

“Are you sure this is a good idea?” Rick slowly kneels down again. Looking at the sharp claws, switch to the flashy looking crown, then back to the claws again.

[ED: look at the claws, now at the chicken, back to the claws - what do  
you see? IT'S A CHICKEN  
SLOTH]

“Hm, doesn’t matter, at worst you will just die, we will make sure to pick everything up for you.”

“Here you go~” The girl picks up the male easily, it settles itself nicely after being set on the youth’s head. Likely due to its small size, it balances itself easily without so much as a flap.

\*guuuuuuu\* “Kokkuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu”\*

The youth gulps nervously before headbutting the creature, who clucks in surprise and brandishes its claws. Bell smirks as the bird turns in midair and aims its head toward Rick, expecting a show. Her smirk disappears as soon as it lands, lunging for her head instead. She quickly moves her head sideways to dodge the creature, but it still managed to draw blood on her cheek.

Bell touches her face where the cut was, clenching her fist when she sees the trace of blood on her hand. “WHY YOU LITTLE! <>!” The fe-linoid brandishes claws of her own before swiping at the surprisingly agile bird.

“Eh, Bell-ne, don’t hurt it~”

\*fiii fiii fiii fiii\* \*fa fa biii biii biii\*

Bell swipes at the small creature who jumps and changes direction in midair by flapping its feathered arms before slashing with its talons. The two go back and forth, trying to hit each other while evading at the same time.

“Eh... shouldn’t we stop her?”

“Okay~”

\*FUUUUMMMUU\*

A loud sound like air imploding reverberates where cat and bird are fighting, followed by dirt flying everywhere. The two stop fighting, pulling away from the shallow hole in the ground, before looking at the girl that’s still pointing her outstretched fingers at where the hole is.

\*kokkoooooo kokokoko\*

The [Namakemono Chicken] quickly runs away, trying to hide behind some trees.

“Huh...?”

“What the hell was that?”

“Oh, just a focused «Air Lance»~”

[ED: damn girl, you scary]

Rick displays a shocked expression as the catwoman questions while moving her eyes from the hole next to her to the girl without moving her head. Till only smiles while giving back a casual answer.

\* \* \* \* \*

\*du du du\*

Soft sounds of wood getting hammered into place fills the air.

“So this is the last one, Kun?”

“No, but these will be the main buildings. The trees will be thinned out a little over there, so we can quickly expand if we need to.”

The bulky, scar-covered man turns to the direction where the younger man is pointing before nodding his head. “Planning ahead, good, good.”

The two had been clearing a portion of Kun’s land further up the road and developing it. Hank pulled some strings with his connections along with some help from Kun’s former comrades to get the manpower and tools necessary for construction. Kun on the other hand went into the family archives, referencing blueprints, layouts, materials nearby, and so forth before providing them to the engineers who will be doing the construction work.

Although technology advanced, the designs offered by Kun still got them excited. They were simple and practical, with so called “lost” methods of affixing material without nails or screws. The availability of stone and timber nearby made the work significantly faster. In just over a month, a compound with 11 different buildings were constructed, with 4 of them being large 3 story-high communal structures while the rest are cabins for storage, utility, and private living space. Two barns were also raised in the processed, that are going to be used for raising animals. A farming field will be added in the spring should their plan become successful.

“Right this way, uncle.”

The young man walks toward one of the large buildings with the older man following.

“So these are the machines, huh?”

Hank leans onto one of the dozen consoles lined up neatly into two rows, each in front of a bed with a cabinet right next to them. The room is sparse save for the limited furniture and machines, with a sanded, varnished, wooden floor made out of entire trees.

“Yep, just hmm... lay down on the bed and I’ll guide you from the console. You can select an avatar and then adjust how it looks. Although you can just go with default and let the machine pick everything for you.”

“It can do that?”

“Yeah, it will just copy yourself as is straight into the game.”

“Let’s do that then.”

“Alright, just follow the prompt and just say default when it asks for what you want to be. Add me into your friend list when you get into the game by just thinking menu, you will see it. The name K-U-N (1). Just hold your right hand like this,” Kun places his right hand at the side of his head, placing the tips of his fingers on his earlobe and face. “Think of me and just speak.”

The man sit on the nearest bed, then imitates the young man. “Like this?”

“Yep.”

“Alright, see you in a bit.”



---

\* \* \* \* \*

Two men stares at each other. One is on top of a large, white, hairy, blob creature. The other is stuck in a pose with one arm stretched out, while a rabbit-like creature slowly slides off the side of a slightly splintered tree.

“I guess I don’t have to explain combat to you... but what’s with your appearance?”

“I’ve no idea, it said something about race suggestion being dwarf and something and I just defaulted all the way.”

“Eh... guess they added some new features then.” Kun scratches his face with a finger while looking down at the even bulkier version of Hank.

“What the hell is that thing?” Pointing at the creature that Kun’s riding on.

“Ah, this would be Sammy.”

\*kero kero\*

The creature croaks in reply while the dwarf walks around the creature. “Weird, I don’t see any tails. Let alone three.”

[T/N: Its name is ??, with the furigana ???]

“That’s just how Till named it. So you wanna right inside or on top?”

“Eh, inside? I think I’ll ride on top.”

---

\*kero kero\*

Sammy starts to flatten itself like a deflating balloon as if on cue.

“What the hell?!”

Kun can only smile at Hank’s surprised expression. He offers a hand to the dwarf to help him on, snapping Hank back to reality. The man fidgets and looks around as Sammy goes back into its usual round, blobby form.

“Won’t I fall off?” He is nervously looking around, holding onto Sammy’s fur for dear life.

“Don’t worry, just give it a moment and hold tight until you get used to it.”

“Eh?” The part underneath the dwarf’s chunky posterior sinks a little, conforming to its shape. Sammy wiggles a little before speeding off toward the Academy, with Hank going “AAAAHHHHHHHHH!” while gripping onto the white hair and flesh tightly.

# Advancement

\*DAN\* \*DAN\* \*DAN\*

The rhythmic sound of metal slamming on metal rings in the air as dog-eared blacksmiths pound away at the ingots with their hammers into their anvils.

\*DDAAAANNNN DDDDDAAAAAANNNN  
DDDDDDDDAAAAAANNNNNNNN\*

On another anvil, a thin, old, sinewy-looking, gray caninoid is holding a faintly glowing misshapen orb with a tong while he pounds away at it with a large hammer that looks oversized for him. Bell, Echo, Rick, Till and a bunch of caninoids that look to be apprentices stare at the man as he works. After reheating and hammering it a few times, the man puts his tools down into a bucket of water that went \*CHHHAAAA\* before turning to the group.

“Tis here be some fine mithril youf got. Mighty pure to ‘stand all that.”

“Wait, mithril?”

“What’s that?”

“Oooooohhh~”

“Wha? Whippersnappers don’t know what mithril is? Why ya ma and pa be ashamed of ye.” The man goes on a long story about the origin, the first master to use it and how mithril works.

Mithril was considered trash when it was first discovered as it is not malleable while being absurdly light. The first master to use it

accidentally mixed in the soon to be disposed mithril ores instead of silver ores while he was making electrum decorative ware, as it was in vogue at the time. After struggling with the resulting alloy, he managed to complete the luxury metal wares for the noble who ordered them. There was a commotion when the Chamberlain of the noble who inspected the goods accused the smith of fraud, a trial was put into place and held quickly. To demonstrate his point, the Chamberlain ordered one of the decorative vases to be smashed with a hammer to show the subpar craftsmanship and shoddy material. Properly made wares would yield and become dent from being struck while subpar wares would crack and flake. But to the surprise of everyone, the hammer sent the vase flying in the trial room, leaving not a single dent on it. The smith was released, with many a noble that wants to buy the inexplicably strong goods from him; the Chamberlain, having caused his lord to lose face and a potential golden goose, was exiled to some frontier village.

There were commotions about his goods, many a general wanted him to make armours and weapons for themselves due to the superior performance of mithril-based items. There were even kidnapping and ransom attempts to force him to reveal his secret formula. After getting kidnapped for the 6th time, he announced to the world how it was made to stop others from going after him. From then on, it was simply a matter of refining and working with the alloy. There was a rush to acquire all the mithril ores on the market, and even though they were considered trash, they were still extremely rare as they only appeared as secondary deposits and sometimes got accidentally mixed in during mining.

In term of density, its solid form is about 9 oram, which is about 2 g/cm<sup>3</sup>. Its liquid state is exactly 100 oram, or 22.2 g/cm<sup>3</sup>. This makes it slightly heavier than White Gold when it's in liquid form and

lighter than most wood when it's in its solid form.

[T/N: Oram is probably a made up measurement since I can't find any reference to it. It reads ???, if there's a better name than Oram, let me know. As for White Gold, White Gold (??) is Platinum, but I'm keeping it as White Gold for wording reasons, actual white gold (????????) will be named White-coloured Gold as per Japanese translation. In the RAW, the original density was  $0.2\text{g/cm}^3$  and  $2.2\text{g/cm}^3$ . There was either a typo or bad conversion, but the editor Ishman caught the error and we had to fiddle with the math a little. Using Platinum as the base, we worked backward to make the densities make sense.]

[Supplementary Edit: The wood in this case is referring to wood native to that as opposed to Earth.]

It behaves similarly to other molten metals when it's in its liquid state, but has extremely high thermal resistance, extreme resilience and rapid cooling when it's in its solid form. As such, most mithril goods today are usually mithril-alloys as opposed to pure mithril.

Bell reaches for her halberd that's strapped to her back, inspecting it. Noticing that while it's light, it's still quite a bit heavier than the wooden ones she used in training. "Old man, if I were to give you more mithril like that chunk there, think you can make a proper weapon with it?"

\*Daaaa\*

"Owww!"

"Shut it ye fool!" The old caninoid lambasts the disciple that accidentally dropped his own hammer onto his foot when he heard that offer. Turning back to Bell with a dangerous glint in his eyes, "where ye be getting the mithril?"

Bell looks to Till meaningfully before shaking their heads, well, except for Rick who still has a questioning expression on his face. Echo on the other hand is also interested as he leans over to inspect the unchanged misshapen orb sitting on the anvil.

“Sorry, can’t tell you.”

“Hmm...” The old caninoid shifts his nose left and right while he contemplates.

The catwoman moves her eyebrows up twice toward the little girl before making her move.

“Well, thanks for all your help, old man.” Bell walks over and reaches toward the orb sitting there.

“We can always ask the elders at Feia or maybe the royal blacksmith in Sardon~”

\*munzu\*

The old man grabs Bell by the wrist in a flash with a death grip, Rick quickly draws two daggers into his hands while Till opens her palm and glares at the blacksmith. Echo looks nervously in all directions at the sudden development as the disciples start fidgeting. “Who said I won’t do it?”

“Who say you would even succeed?” Bell replies in a calm voice as she shifts her gaze from the orb to the man grabbing her wrist.

\*Ahahahahahaha\*

The old blacksmith laughs as he lets go of the felinoid’s limb, nodding

his head as he does so.

“Ye be right, ye be right! Ye saw right through me didn’ ya? What smith woun’d want to work wit mithril, especially it tis pure?! I woun need a propa forge though...”

“Oooohhh, I think I can do that, the king owes me~”

“Oh right, totally forgot about that!”

“Wait, he does...? Oh right! He does!”

Echo, the blacksmith and his disciples all turn to stare at the girl with dumbfounded expressions. They all know how she’s like the adopted granddaughter of Alfina and that she’s somewhat special, but they are now questioning their own sanity that such a little girl can bend the ear of a king.

\* \* \* \* \*

\*OOOooooooooo\* \*suka\*

A tall, lanky, buff, hairy humanoid rushes at an old man standing next to the pile of bodies with a roar, with the pile consisting of its comrades. The creature swings its massive club as soon as he gets into range.

\*sa goin goin goin goin goin goin goin goin goin\*

The old man quickly moves, yet he’s remaining in the same spot. The creature tries to block the seemingly unmoving man, that’s 2 heads shorter and significantly smaller than it, unsuccessfully; each time it tries to block, it gets hit somewhere totally unexpected. Small, sharp, powerful blows land all over the creature, unable to resist or even make a squeak, it simply falls on its knees before toppling over onto the pile with a \*zuzoooo daaaa\*.

“How do you like Second Phantasia, Master Zhong?” A lanky looking elf questions the elderly man with steam coming off of his clothing. A few other people of varying appearances are lined up further back.

“Hmph! This certainly feels amazing... but what do I get out of it? I can just use this like everyone else.”

“I mean no offense, but what weapons are you weakest at?”

“Hm...”

“How about western swords?”

The old man nods his head in acknowledgement. The elf swings his right hand up and holds up his index and middle finger. The people in the back start a commotion until a youth comes running while carrying a longsword as someone's lifeless body is laid onto the ground.

“Here, master.” The youth presents the sword to the old man before backing away.

The old master swings the sword clumsily, as would be expected of a novice.

“Give us a moment, practice swinging the sword to your heart's content.”

The old man's form improves quite a bit as he practices various slashes and thrusts. But it's obvious that he would lose to anyone that knows how to wield the same sword. After a few moments, the lifeless body that was laying on the ground gets up and gives the elf a thumb up.



“Excuse me, Master Zhong. Please use your sword against another one of these trolls. Use it as long as you can, feel free to abandon it when you feel you are in danger, but hold out as long as possible.”

\*fun\*

The old man grunts dismissively as the elf readies his arrow and stares into the various caves.

\*pyu\*

He releases an arrow that flies into one of the caves.

\*OOOOOoooooooooooo\*

A troll comes out screaming, spots the old man and rushes toward him. The master readies the sword in front of him and starts shuffling his legs. His face scowls as his body makes minor adjustments on its own, he gives the elf a quick glance who simply nods with a smile.

\*kan\*

The creature swings its massive club at the old man, knocking the longsword away to his side. Unexpectedly, the master's body tilts to the side, following the sword. In one smooth motion, the sword dips toward the ground before sweeping upward, slashing the troll in the torso. The old man reveals a smirk on his face as he puts his body into awkward positions before shuffling into place, parrying, counter-attacking and later proactively attacking. The troll went from being in the offensive, swinging with its massive club to push the old man aside, to being completely defensive, unable to even swing its club, after a dozen exchanges. The old man squints his eyes before quickly moving within the same spot as before.

“sa gokin gokin gokin gokin gokin gokin gokin\*"

The sounds of bones breaking fills the air, the creature couldn't even react as it falls unconscious from the sudden pain.

\*zuzo\* \*daaa\*

The troll falls next to the pile, and unlike the other trolls that were defeated, the limbs of this troll are all bent out of shape in unnatural angles.

“How does it feel, old master? Our program will allow you to access the compensation settings, correcting your basic forms as you go along. Of course, the program will only correct the your strike, your stance, your movement and so forth. It will not teach the reason behind the form or how to use it effectively. Neither will it teach you which forms to string together to perform unique techniques from that school. This means that the reasoning and the teaching behind each school's respective art will not be known by outside practitioners. This way, different martial artists can further advance their own art by analyzing the forms from other schools without stealing each others' secrets.” The elf looks down at the just-defeated troll and then the pile of trolls next to it. “I mean, I'm almost certain there's no longsword technique within the Shadowless School, and yet...” The elf shifts his gaze back onto the troll that's laying on the ground like a broken doll.

[T/N: This part drove us both the T/Ler and ED INSANE. English lacks many technical martial arts terms, even thesaurus didn't help.

Special moves sound stupid, I bashed my brain for "unique techniques", gahhhhh, hope it doesn't appear like this again, or at least use wuxia terminology damn you!]

“Will everyone get access to this program?”

“Yes, to a certain extent, all the masters and up to 3 of their disciples will have the unrestricted version of the program specially installed into their avatars. The rest of the users will have to work their way up slowly. We will also open a dojo in all major user-locations where instructors chosen by you and other masters can run classes and recruit prospective students to teach the proper way of using the arts from the respective school.”

The old man shows a cunning expression, “that’s devilish of you, give everyone a taste by correcting the forms, but not the how to or reason for the forms. Making everyone that wants to know more about it to seek the original source, excellent, excellent.” The old man cups his jaw with one hand before rubbing his index finger along his jawline for a few moments. “Alright, give me an arsenal of every weapon type that have a master contributing to it and I’ll accept it.”

The elf smiles broadly before bowing deeply at his waist.

\* \* \* \* \*

\*da da da\*

*ARGHHHHHH, SO ANNOYING! The continuous noise and hammering is going to drive me crazy!*

I tried going hunting and swimming for many days, but the sound is everywhere. Only the wet prey seems unaffected, but I can’t sleep like this!

\*waku waku\*

I leap in the air before shaking myself dry, clenching the wet prey in my mouth.

\*bamu\*

Putting it on the ground, I devour the still moving prey as I have my meal.

Sleep, Sleep, Sleep, Sleep.

A sudden thought enters my mind - my sleep deprived mind stumbling upon a possibility I never thought of. Why don't I sleep in my fake sleep?

I rush back home, cleaning myself at the entrance to the first room.

\*waku waku\*

Giving myself another shake, I run onto the bed that's in the back room. Brother hasn't been using it lately, so I might as well use it. I jump onto the bed, circle the center of the bed a bit before laying down. I close my eyes like last time, colours swirls by, like whenever I dive into the water, greeting me.

\*za za\*

The colours give way to the darkness. I can hear the soft sound of wind blowing, rustling the trees and grass.

I open my eyes and look around. I'm in a room again, looking up, I see a different wooden floor from last time. I get up from my spot, I notice I'm on something soft wrapped in cloth, I give a quick sniff and I

recognize the scent of the man and the girl from before right away. Dragging the bundled cloth, I put it where the sunlight is pouring in from the window. I circle the cloth to get comfortable before laying back down on it, taking a nap.

# Country

[T/N: The chapter title is ?, which is country, but can also mean kingdom as in ??]

\*kin kin kin\*

"Hey! That's mine!"

"First come, first serve!"

"Need more booze here!"

The sounds of utensils tapping onto cookware fills the large room. A rough-looking crowd of men and women fill the seats, fighting over the food and alcohol.

"Damn it kid, why the hell are you here in the boonie?! You should open a restaurant in the city an- Hey! Hands off!"

The burly white-haired construction engineer ribs Kun while fending off his co-workers for the venison that's being served by the black-haired young man. All the workers here are related to the Untouchables of the military in one way or another. There's a saying, "if you were ever part of the military, you're either still a part of it, or are an Untouchable." Although the practice has been illegal for just over twenty years, the stigma and governmental programs are still in place to prolong its existence. Rather than concerning itself if a disgraced or retired soldier will somehow affect the image of the government, it's better for them to be completely isolated and be given dangerous jobs where even if they die, no one would be the wiser, not even their family. Of course, that was prior to the "Writ Ascension", the populist revolution that supplanted the Council of Tribal Elders with written,

enforceable laws for all. Nowadays, the Untouchables are just simply not hired by any civilian companies due to stigma, that those that would hire them would be targeted by the government and the Reaper of Souls. The government pay lip service to their sacrifice and claims to support them, but it's really just to keep the ex-military members and their family on a short leash.

[T/L: ??? - I was torn between Burakugunmin or Untouchables, I think it's making a reference to ??? - "Burakumin was an outcast group at the bottom of the Japanese social order that has historically been the victim of severe discrimination and ostracism".]

"Hank! Mind introducing me and letting me marry him? He can cook for me everyday instead of just during Harvest Moon!" A petite, muscular woman jokes with the man covered in scars while waving around a turkey leg.

"Hey hey, I don't care if he's a guy, I'd marry him too!"

"What'd your wife think?!"

"She'd be happy she won't have to cook anymore!"

\*ahahahahahaha\*

Laughter fills the room as the Harvest Moon Feast continues. No one recalls why a feast is held during Harvest Moon, it's just simply a tradition that likely predates the Age of Chaos. Since the construction works had to be extended due to unforeseen trouble, Kun offered to host them. Unexpectedly, that provided the workers with a motivation that would scare the gods. As a result, all the primary tasks were completed in record time, only minor tasks that'd need a handful of people to complete remain. As such, all the workers are partying up, with some of them bringing in food and booze of their own to share.

Kun smiles as he brings out the food non-stop. As soon as one item leaves the oven, another enters it. Greens and vegetables are prepared just before they run out. He had been alone for years, it wasn't too long ago that Gui and then Hank showed up to share the holiday with. A happy feeling swells in his chest while he labours away.

\* \* \* \* \*

"He, he's doing what?!"

"You heard me, he's going to be employing the likes of Corporal Pamuk."

The red-faced, burly white-haired man sobers up at the mention of the name as each of them holds a mug of liquor in their hands, just outside the dining hall where most of the workers fell asleep after enjoying themselves too much.

"Last I heard, he was sent to one of the Military Homes... no one ever gets out of there, how's that kid of yours going to get the old Sarge out?"

"Heh, Barthos, the bigwigs screwed up, hard. Guess how I was able to get all you dumbasses to come here to build this place."

The burly man nods before taking a sip from his mug. "Seriously Hank, who the hell IS this kid? A brother to a fox? That the god-damned bigwigs are afraid of him? Fairytales are Fairytales for a reason you know. Don't tell me he's some god-damned guidance spirit from the Plane of Dreams that the old shamans tell the kids."

"You know about the Twin Falls' Conference?"



“Isn’t that where the filthy Almans murdered everyone else at the Peace Conference?”

“He’s a survivor from there, made it all the way back to Nampa Outpost on his own. Some goddamned son of bitch tried to steal his parents’ inheritance.” The scarred man gulps down his liquor before pouring himself another mug, topping off his friend’s as well.

“Been almost a decade... the only kids were... wait, he’s THEIR kid?”

Hank stares up at the full moon before taking a sip of his drink. “Yep, bastards sent him back here without telling us. They brought him here, hoping to take over everything as per the State Inheritance law.”

Barthos’ face turns red, not from drunkenness, but from anger. “Wait... can’t they just claim it was some underling that did it?”

Hank shows a wry smile, “they found some corpses and a military assigned pickup truck for a certain missing governor hidden away near here.”

The white-haired man stares at the reflection of the moon in his cup for a few moments, before chugging the entire thing. He grabs the bottle and drinks the remaining liquor straight from the bottle.

\*haaaaaaaaaa\*

“Just to let you know, Kun took down a grizzly, apparently the one that the bastards tried to use to kill him with.”

“Oh come on! He couldn’t have been an adult then! Even we can’t say we can take down a goddamn grizz on our own! Next you are going to tell me he can fly too!”

“Actually...”

Barthos' shoulders sags, “nonono, not going to believe you. I don't think I can handle all this, the next thing I know, the sky's going to fall.” He reaches over for the remaining bottle, uncorks it with a \*pon\* before filling both their mugs. “What the hell are you doing anyways? Pamuk was a great leader, but he's handicapped now.”

“He's going to be helping out in training.”

“How?”

“Have you heard of Second Phantasia?”

“Who hasn't?”

“That's where we will be training the greenhorns.”

“Wah...? Isn't it just some stupid game for people to waste time on?”

“I thought so too, well, until I tried it anyways. It feels almost real, we can even use real weapons and actually try to kill each other, like on a battlefield.”

“Damn...”

“Why, you want to join?”

“I'd think half the people here would jump at the chance to do that.”

Hank simply smiles before bringing the mug to his mouth.

\* \* \* \* \*

\*hyuu\* \*gaba gaba\*

Wild wind stirs the curtains as two figures approach the window from the sky.

\*bou\*

As soon as the figures reach over to open the slightly ajar window, a small flame inside the room flares up, temporary blinding them.

“Welcome, welcome, I’ve been expecting you.” A middle-age man with a lean, muscular build and brown hair lowers the lamp in his hands before opening the windows for the stunned duo dressed in midnight blue.

“Eh...”

“Come on in, make yourselves at home, wine?” The man turns around toward the pitcher sitting on a table nearby, causing his purple cloak to flutter.

The two girls shrug and enter through the window. They managed a “No thanks.” as they find a spot to stand.

\*tatatatatata\* \*gacha\*

Sounds of quick footsteps can be heard followed by the sound of the door opening. “Sorry, my liege, we didn’t expect you to wake up so suddenly!” A young squire suddenly appears after opening the door abruptly. The youth drops to a kneeling position before looking up at his king, spotting the two suspicious figures “Gua-”

"Quiet!" The man gives a stern command, freezing the squire's voice midword. \*fuuu\* Sighing while closing his eyes for a moment, he waves his hands "these are my guests, you are dismissed."

The squire stammers wordlessly as he looks back and forth between his king and the figures. Seeing his king's expression slowly turning into a scowl, he bows his head toward the floor before getting up and slowly back out the door, closing it slowly.

"Sorry about that, Till was it? And who might you be? You must be either Isníc or Trovane. Come come, have a seat." The man sits down and pours himself a glass of ruby liquid after gesturing to the seats across the table.

The two of them hesitantly walk toward the table and seat themselves after uncovering their faces that are hidden behind a midnight blue cloth. They are still stunned that the king had expected them and actually knows them by name, even in their clothing.

"Aaahhhhh." The man takes a sip of the wine before releasing a sound of satisfaction. His face turns into a face of concern when he looks at the two, then a relaxed look appears on his face as though he solved some problem. "Don't be so on guard, it didn't take much to figure out that it was you. Considering that my guards never spotted any of you the first time, that means you two came as birds. Very few people can do that, and all of them are connected to my old friend. And then the army that appeared from nowhere with no hostilities that travelled through my kingdom using my old friend's name. How is that old witch anyways?" The man shows a subtle expression, something like a faint smile as he asks his question.

"She passed away a while ago." Isníc gives a curt reply, causing an

awkward silence as the king's happy expression turns blank before turning into a look of disbelief.

"You've my condolences." The man raises his glass toward the direction of the Academy before downing it in one go. He sits still for a moment with his eyes closed before refilling the the glass. He takes a sip and make a face as though the taste of the wine turned bad before putting the glass down. "Let's get down to business. I have to ask, what's that army doing here?"

"They are the people she had been looking for..."

"I see... that's unfortunate." The king lifts the glass of wine, stares at it, putting it back down before getting another glass and fills it with water from another pitcher. He takes a drink before continuing. "I presume you two here are about the payment?"

The two of them nod. "We are in need of a special type of forge, so we'd like two large hollow cylinders of your strongest metal that can withstand the most heat and temperature change. The first one just needs to be half your height and just as wide, the second needs to be two hands wider. The rest should be made the same way too, we need-"

"Wait wait, slow down." The king gets up, walks over to his stationary, sliding out a small drawer from the right side shelf on top of the desk revealing a small, dried black pool. Directly behind it is a small cylinder with a handle, which the king turns slowly and deliberately. Black liquid from the bottom of the cylinder seeps out, collecting into an engraved path next to the cylinder and gathers at the previously dried pool. Grabbing a quill that's stacked on the left side of the shelf with his other hand, he sticks it into his mouth before reaching for a vellum sheet on top of the shelf. He finally stops turning the handle after

unrolling the vellum into place, he takes the quill in his now free right hand and dips it into the ink. "Okay, two hollow cylinders, half my height, just as wide. Second one is two hands wider. And...?"

The two snaps out of their daze and walk over. "Umm... there needs to be two slots on both side, those two slots must connect to both cylinders and be sealed tight. So two bars can slide through them, like this." Till makes her hands into a V, at 90 degrees, with a small gap between bottom of the two. "We will need two hollow bars just slightly smaller than the slots and a grill that's just slightly bigger than the largest cylinder."

The king stops writing suddenly and turns to Till with a questioning look, "a grill?"

"Hm... grill might be too hard to make... how about a sheet with many, many holes? More holes than metal in fact. As for the treasury, give us the heaviest treasure you have."

The king stops writing again, "why the heaviest?"

"We need something extremely heavy."

"How about I get the royal smiths to make you guys the largest encased block of gold we can make instead? That'd be way heavier than any treasure I have."

"Are you sure?"

"Certainly, better than misusing the treasures in any case..." The king quickly finishes up writing, rolls up the vellum, grabs a candle on the shelf, lights it up before dripping the wax onto the open edge of the scroll. He quickly stamps the ring on his middle finger onto the wax,

making a royal seal.

“We’d also like to ask you a favour.”

“Ah, right. I did promise that, didn’t I?”

“It’s nothing outrageous, we’d just like to open a trading post. If possible, we’d like to pay the tax in the form of goods during initial entry. For each goods up to 10 units, we will give 1 unit as a form of tax.”

The king frowns, “why can’t you pay it in coinage like everyone else?”

Till closes her eyes for a moment to recall the discussion with Bell prior to coming here. “It’s simple, the goods we’d be bringing have no fixed price as it simply doesn’t exist in your kingdom. We will mutually benefit since the worth of your taxation will be equivalent to the worth of our goods. If it’s popular, you can always sell it and also be guaranteed a supply of those goods without having to make us a royal purveyor. If it isn’t popular, we don’t lose more money than necessary.”

“That doesn’t seem right, why must my kingdom bear any risk of your goods not becoming popular.”

Till simply smiles, “because you don’t want us to stop trading once we start.” She nods her head at Isnic, who reaches for a small bag lodged inside of the midnight blue clothing and presents it to the king. “Try it in the morning, I believe the one called Mikhal was particularly fond of it.”

The king narrows his eyes before picking it up and inspecting it. “What is this?”

“We call it tea, you simply put some leaves in a container like a cup or

a bowl, fill it up with hot water and let it soak for a bit before drinking.”

The king simply raise his eyebrows, “this isn’t enough to convince me, I’d like a favour as well.”

“Oh?”

“I overheard from the Feian troops that your Academy is opened for their citizens, I’d like the same.”

Till maintains a neutral face while pretending to think. “As long as your citizens pay the tuition, I don’t see any problems with that.”

“Then we shall see if this arrangement will be as beneficial as you say.”

Both the girls get up, giving a bow before a “thank you for your time and sorry for disturbing you.”

The king wryly returns a “just come in from the front the next time.” in reply.

\*gaba\*

The curtains flap for a moment as the two jump out the window. The king remains seated, narrowing his brows. He takes the scroll and breaks the seal. Reaching over to a small silver bell, he gives a ring with a \*karan\* as he studies the materials Till has asked for. “What is this...? This looks neither like a hearth nor a bloomery, how can this be part of a forge?”

[T/N: Bloomery... why the hell is called ?????? when it’s obviously a borrowed word, it should be in katakana. Even then, google gave me



the result of flowers and a goddamn rockband... \*flips table\*]

\*kara\*

“Yes, my liege?” The squire from before opens the door and kneels down shortly after.

“Take away the wine, and also notify the the royal smiths to meet me tomorrow afternoon. Oh, and get me Donavic for tomorrow’s first audience.”

“The Barwn, sire?”

“No, his 3rd son, the one named Mikhal.”

\* \* \* \* \*

\*kara kara\* \*dota dota\*

The door guards open the elaborate doors to the audience hall for what looks like a boy before marching back to their designated spots after silently closing the door. Before the steps to the throne in the magnificent stone hall stands a small table, with various bowls, cups, mugs and a jar of hot water as well as a container holding some dried leaves. A stool is provided next to the table.

“Long live the king!” The boy presents himself next to the table, bringing his right fist to his left shoulder before kneeling down on one knee, keeping his eyes on the floor.

“At ease, make yourself a drink and sit down.”

The boy gets up and smiles ear to ear upon seeing the leaves. He takes

a few leaves, throws it in a bowl, pouring some hot water in it. Seeing that there's no lid, he grabs a serving plate and covers the bowl with it before sitting down.

"Mikhal Donavic, due to your timely arrival at Feia leading to the success of driving out the immortals. You are hereby bestowed the advancement of two ranks from Squire to the title of Knight 1st class by the generosity of His Majesty." Silence follows before the Chancellor who read the scroll coughs and whispers. "Wake up."

The boy quickly gets to a kneeling position. "Ackno-.. eh.. Thank you, your Majesty".

The man draped in fineries and a purple cloak sitting on the throne gives a quick wave. Mikhal quickly gets back to his seat and takes a sip of the tea to calm his nerves.

"Donavic!"

"Sir!"

"I assign you to attend the Academy with my younger sons and daughter and to protect them! You will be assigned a dozen Knights 2nd class, a dozen Squires and a dozen Pages to complete your task! Additionally, you are to be the liaison representing Sardon. If there is anything notable within the Academy, you are to report it at once! A seasonal report is expected from you. Understand?!"

"Yes, my liege!"

"Good, you are dismissed!"

The boy takes a bow and is about to turn his back. He stops mid-

motion, reaches for the bowl of tea, drinks it in one gulp, before bowing again and leaving the audience chamber.

\*kara kara\* \*dota dota\*

The door guards open the door from the inside this time, with the familiar sound of marching feet and the sight of the silently closing door.

\*karan karan\*

The king rings the silver bell that's resting on his throne. A servant quickly appears, bowing as soon as he gets to his designated spot.

"Yes, my liege?"

"Go prepare the leaves in a bowl of hot water for me, the same as the one on the table there."

The Chancellor turns toward his king with a conspiring smile.

"Right, make that two bowls. Seems like the Chancellor is curious too."

The servant quickly bows and swiftly takes the bowl of leaves before disappearing to the side of the audience hall. Other servants quickly appear to remove the utensils, the table and stool.

The Chancellor announces with a loud and clear voice. "Next!"

# Preparations

\*fuuuuuuu\*

“Who would have thought we were so close by auntie...?” A man with dog ears sighs as he stands with his hands behind his back, facing a small hill full of zinnia flowers in bloom. A small breeze rustles through the nightscape, carrying the sound of festivity from somewhere nearby.

“When we arrived and exited the cavern, it was a sea of fire as far as the eyes can see. We lost a few men and a large portion of our supplies trying to force our way out. We should’ve been more patient, who would’ve thought that there’s such a thing as a Dry Season and that it’s a common occurrence for that area to be set aflame? I fail as a commander...” The caninoid laments his failures as he pour some wine onto the ground, in front of a gravestone a few paces away. He drinks from the bottle afterward before resuming.

“We rushed back into the cavern after our failure to get out, hoping to find another way out. We ended up stumbling into the heart of the cave where a Guardian Familiar resides. It spoke in old Nessik, so old that I had a hard time understanding it. It was fortunate that you and mother made me study those dead languages, otherwise I think it would’ve killed us all. It seems its master wanted it to guard the lake of lava for some reason and just simply disappeared one day. It kept asking about some empire and the outside world. It seems it has been many years since it last had any visitors. It ended up offering to protect us as well as long as we stay in the cavern. With our dwindling supplies, we really had no choice. So we set up a hibernation chamber and took turns staying awake to make sure no one died in their sleep.”

The man opens another bottle of wine with a \*pon\*, pouring more wine onto the ground.

“Supplies dropped to zero, there was nothing we can do, we simply let some of the men die in their sleep. It was at least better than having them suffer a slow, painful death from starvation.” The caninoid pulls his face into a mocking smile. “Then the immortals showed up. Cerebus and its minions managed to kill the intruders after the immortals attacked the lesser minions. They dragged back the much needed supplies of food and water to us, they came infrequently, but if they can get in, that means we can get out. We tried to send some scouts out, but they were attacked by the immortals, shouting some nonsense about ‘Rare mob’.” The caninoid’s snout wrinkles a bit before sitting down, grabbing some meat on a plate resting on the floor and starts eating it.

“We waited as more supplies came trickling in, that’s when we knew the immortals as immortals, they kept coming back even after dying. Our supplies went from zero to barely sustainable after we woke everyone up to feed themselves. Since all of us were weakened, we started training in cycles as the others go back into hibernation. We wanted to be in top condition when we break out. So we ate more, trained more, while stocking up supplies all the while. We should’ve gotten out sooner, we could’ve reunited! We were so close!” The man grabs another piece of meat before forcefully tearing it in half with his mouth.

“This place is amazing, Aunt Defaye. You managed to turn a forest into a sanctuary for orphans with the help of two immortals. The respect that little girl has for you is like from that of a granddaughter... And the rest of the kids, they are maintaining this place well.” Sekn reaches for the amulet hanging from his neck, lightly squeezing it. “You held onto our secret and treasures to the very end... I guess you didn’t want to cause another tragedy like with our kingdom. We will keep looking

for our citizens, but I don't think we will try to revive our kingdom. This is a new land, with new people and immortals to boot. We will seal most of the treasures until we absolutely need it. But I think I should at least return this..."

\*za za za\*

"Commander." A shadow approaches from the direction of the main building, where numerous fires are lit on the open fields before it. The figure carries a large tray of food in one hand and several bottles in the other.

"Ah, Echo. Something the matter?"

"Nay, just trying to get some air. The men are getting a bit too rowdy for my ears. Figured you could use some company."

"I guess I could... pretty much done reporting everything to her." The man sitting on the grass pours a little more wine onto the ground before drinking it straight from the bottle. "So what do you think of this place?"

"It's great, we've got some real food for once." The still standing man sets the tray down onto the floor next to the sitting figure and sits down as well before setting the bottles nearby. He grabs one of the fist-size, leaf-wrapped chunks of meat from the tray and starts eating. "Strange way of eating the food, but way better than the those travel rations we've been living on."

"... Is food always the first thing on your mind?"

"You tell me." Echo points to the men singing, dancing and sparring in the distance. "Food and shelter are needed for survival, with this kind

of weather, we can sleep under the stars.”

“Clothing, Food, Shelter, Transport’. Clothing we can make our own, and we’ve our Familiars.” \*fuuu\* “Why must you always be right?”

[T/N: ???? again, but he emphasizes each of the kanji separately, so I don’t feel right just calling it “basic necessity”]

“I wouldn’t be your advisor otherwise.” Echo tosses a chunk of meat that looks like a roasted rabbit into his commander’s hands before grabbing another one of the leaf-wrapped meat and stuffing it into his mouth.

“So Mr. Advisor, what should we do?”

“Honestly? I don’t mind settling down here, no war, it’s peaceful, there’s even a future here. I’ve no idea what possessed Ma’am Defaye to set up an academy, but I’m damned impressed. Did you know there’s some kids that are keeping track of the food and drink that we are eating right now? Your dad would’ve kidnapped them and made them work for him.”

\*ahahahaha\*

Sekn laughs heartily before taking a bite out of the rabbit and washing it down with a swig of the bottle. “You are damn right he would.”

“I think we should at least contribute here. We can make this our base of operations, that way we have a place for them if we do find any survivors. If we get too big, we will at least have some goodwill that can help us should we have to move.”

“I’m of a similar thought actually.”

“Good, so I was thinking, use a plain camp blueprint, substitute the Command Headquarters with the main Academy building. We will expand the farmlands first since we have a 3 month period, that’s enough for a growing season, we will ask some of the kids what they grow here and copy them. With the remaining forces, we will build some longhouses near it for the time being since they’ve lumber just laying around. More permanent housing can be built later, considering how packed we were in the cavern, this should be fine for the time being. We should start a training regime...”

The two of them talk through the night as the rest of their men celebrate their first night at the Academy,

\* \* \* \* \*

“Sir! The first longhouse is ready for inspection!”

“Good, I’ll get to it right away.” Echo does a quick bow to his commander before leaving the messenger and Sekn behind.

“How are the fields coming along?”

“A lack of tools have made progress slow, we’ve already dispatched a squadron with Lieutenant Elms to procure supplies with some of the immortals, Sir!”

\*ta ta ta\*

The slow sound of footsteps approaches the two, causing the commander to turn, the messenger following suit soon after.

“Greetings, Commander.”



“Good morning, Sir.”

A young man with black hair and a fair coloured youth with small deer horns protruding from his head make their way before the dog-eared commander.

“Ah, Master Kun. And...?”

“Mak’ra, Sir.”

“Eh... just call me Kun.” The young man scratches his cheek at the unexpected title.

“Hmm... how about Kun-sensei then? Just call me Sekn then.”

Giving up on trying to get another compromise, “Alright then, Sekn-cho. How is everything so far?”

“Quite well, we’ve finished the planning process and completed a prototype for our lodging. The fields would need some more work since we didn’t have the right tools. Hm... is there anything else, Private?”

“Sir! We would likely be lacking lumber halfway through the construction. We are also in need of a source of fresh water if we are to reduce the amount of manpower to acquire water.”

“Hm... water...?”

“Why?”

Mak’ra and Kun look at each other before looking back at the messenger. Who in turn looks at the two in confusion by shifting her eyes back and forth between them. She finally says something to break the awkward silence.

“We need water to sustain ourselves.”

“Can’t you... just create your own water?”

“With no disrespect, Mas- ahem, Kun-sensei. Conjured water immediately weakens individuals who drink it since it draws upon the person’s internal mana to completely manifest the complete physical form of water.”

“Huh...?” It’s now Kun’s turn to look confused. “Is that true, Mak’ra?”  
“I’ve no idea sensei, we’ve been using conjured water as long as I remember. The former headmistress did say it’s okay as long as we use it within the [Forest of Illusions].”

“Alright, can you please get a mug for me, Mak’ra?”

“Certainly, sensei.”

The deer-horned youth dashes off towards the main building, leaving the three others behind.

“We can run a little experiment, if it works, we can provide all the water you need.” Kun squints his eyes as a group of caninoids gathers around a pillar of wood, standing it up next to the completed long-house. “Hmm... are they expanding that house?”

“Hmm...? Private?”

“Sir! It seems like Echo is satisfied with the prototype, so I would guess they got the go ahead to start mass production.”

\*fuuuu\*

Kun gives a sigh, “I don’t mean to be meddlesome, but you might want

to stop that and reconsider the planning.”

“Not at all Kun-sensei, please, speak your mind. Private, halt the constructions and get Echo here as soon as possible.”

“Sir!” The private gives a salute to Sekn and Kun before running off toward the completed longhouse.

“What seems to be your concern, Kun-sensei?”

“Hmm... you see, I’m also having constructions done at my home. We have something known as a Fire Code that I recently learned.”

“Fire Code?”

“Yes, there is an established law in my country that prevents and mitigate the potentials of a fire disaster. In this case, if, say, that house there is to catch fire for any reason, it wouldn’t be hard to imagine that the house next to it will catch fire soon after as well.”

Sekn nods in agreement. “Yes, that’s certainly the case. We modeled it after an encampment we’d use on a plain, we didn’t take that into account since we usually just destroy the tents that caught on fire since they are temporary... but these are dwellings... We are very thankful for your wisdom, Kun-sensei.”

The man in question scratches his cheeks again, “I just learnt all this recently, I’m glad to be of help.”

“If you don’t mind, please take a look at our plans when Echo gets here. We should’ve asked you and your companions for advice in the first place. Sorry for causing problems.”

“It’s no trouble at all, we are all learning here...” Kun tilts his head to

the side, a look of concentration appears on his face mid-sentence.

\*tatata\*

“Here you go, Kun-sensei!” Mak’ra appears suddenly with a mug in hand, presenting it to Kun.

“Oh, um, thank you.” The young man snaps out of it and receives the mug. Turning back toward the blind commander, “how much conjured water would be necessary to feel the draining effect you mentioned?”

“A mug would certainly be enough.”

“Okay, please excuse me then. <>.”

\*pichan pichan pichan\*

Pearls of water materialize over the mug and drop straight into the cup, causing a continuous string of splashes. As soon as the last pearl disappears into the mug of water, Kun drinks it down in one go and finish with a \*haaaaaa\*.

“Hmm... I don’t feel anything, if you don’t mind Mak’ra. <>.”

\*pichan pichan pichan\*

The mug is once again filled with water, Kun hands it to his student, who starts drinking it with audible gulps. Mak’ra hands the cup back to his sensei after finishing.

“Feel anything?”

“Not at all, it was refreshing though.”

“If you don’t mind, Sekn-cho. <>.”

The now familiar sound of the mug being filled can be heard again. Kun place the mug near the blind commander’s hand, who turns his wrist to hold it properly. He starts drinking it right away.

“WHAT THE HELL ARE YOU DOING?!” An angry looking Echo knocks the mug out of Sekn’s grip with one hand while reaching for Kun with the other. A sudden mass of colour slams itself into his abdomen before Echo manages to reach his target.

\*batann\*

A surprised and angry looking Mak’ra is on top of an equally surprised and angry Echo.

“STAND DOWN, ADVISOR!”

“BUT-”

“STAND DOWN, THAT’S AN ORDER! I apologize for his behaviour.” Sekn walks over to Mak’ra and offers a hand in a relatively obvious fashion. The deer-horned youth takes the hand and gets up with the commander’s help. “Good work, that’s some amazing reaction.”

Mak’ra can only stammer a “thank you” before retreating to where his sensei is still standing.

Kun also gives the youth a pat in appreciation and whispers “guess the training paid off hmm?”

The commotion draws attention from the various workers that had stopped working as ordered.

“What’s the meaning of this, Advisor?” The frost-laced edge is audible within the tone of Sekn’s voice. Using Echo’s title instead of his name isn’t lost on the subordinates that are silently watching, Echo isn’t stupid enough not to notice it as well.

“He was going to give you conjured water! I saw him create it before giving it to you!”

“You idiot! I knew that!”

Echo’s face change from anger into a face of confusion. “What...?”

\*fuuuu\* “Someone get the mug, Kun-sensei, please make another cup for me please.”

One of the caninoids snatches the mug that’s resting on the floor, gives it a quick polish, before handing it to the young man. Kun fills the mug again before walking over and handing it over to the angry Sekn.

“Wai-” Echo tries to get up and stop his commander from drinking the water, but he manages to drink it all in one go.

Wiping his mouth with the back of his hand, Sekn stares down at Echo before knocking him on his back with a swift kick to his chest. “They drank it in front of me to prove it’s safe. I just drank it, it didn’t drain me, it is freaking delicious! Do you understand now?”

Echo looks up in disbelief with a stupefied expression.

\*fuuu\* “Sorry to bother you again, Kun-sensei. If you don’t mind.”

Kun replies with a nod and fills the mug again. Sekn walks to where his advisor had fallen and thrusts the mug forward in his general

direction. "Drink."

Echo tries to protest, but the icy-cold tone stops him. He timidly takes the cup and drinks the water, expecting to be weakened afterward. Everyone look at him intently, but there's no change. Realizing his error, Echo gets up quickly, dashes toward Kun and Mak'ra before sliding into a dogeza.

"I humbly apologize for my mistake." The kneeling man's voice is shakey, his ears droop down, showing his shame.

"Don't worry about it, it's-

\*dota dota\*

Sekn stomps over, obviously still very angry. "You think that's enough of an apology?! They offered their hospitality! They continued Defaye's legacy! They showed sincerity by using it on themselves first! Get on your back!"

Echo timidly follows the order, knowing what is being asked of him. He gets on his back, exposing his stomach, all the meanwhile holding an expression full of regret.

"I sincerely apologize for my misconduct."

"Please accept his apology and step on his stomach." The commander makes a bow toward the two.

"Umm... are you sure?"

"Unless you don't want to accept his apology then?" Sekn nods slowly. "Private, get me my sword."

“Wait, wait, we just have to step on him right?” Kun walks up to the man on his back and lightly puts his boot on him before backing off, allowing Mak’ra to do the same. Echo quickly gets up and immediately returns to his dogeza position, visibly repenting.

\*fuuu\* “Wow, sorry about that.” The commander sighs heavily before apologizing. “All of you, gather around, Kun-sensei is going to be making some changes to our plans, pay attention.”

The Private from before appears out of nowhere and produces a velum sheet. Sekn turns his palm skyward before directing it at Kun “If you will.”

“Umm... yes, first, we need to increase the distance between the houses. This is to prevent fire from spreading should there be one. We can afford to just let it burn if we can’t put it out in time. Secondly, the main road should be paved to-”

“You sure?” A dark-skinned caninoid interrupts Kun mid-sentence. “We don’t have the material for it.”

“What do you mean?” Kun looks confused. “We have storage of stone if you need it.”

The caninoid looks toward his commander who gives a nod. “Stone will get crushed quickly when placed on living lands. Sure, paved roads make it easy to travel, but it’s hard to maintain since it can’t withstand the pressure from the ground. You’d need special minerals that’s capable of holding mana to resist the pressure.”

“I see, thank you for letting me know. Then we will just widen the main roads to be 3 wagons wide for now, please refer to Mak’ra for the



actual size when you are measuring. Please make a list for the necessary material for a paved road as well.”

The caninoid raises one of his brows for the humility and lack of hurt pride in the response and simply nods.

“Since conjured water is proven to be safe here, I’d recommend having ponds here, here, here and here. They will double as our training ground for water magic. A central reservoir will be placed here, between the houses and fields, so time won’t be wasted travelling back and forth. Our students can dig holes at these locations, just let us know once you guys marked off the spots. Also, please order our students around for things like moving material, harvesting, construction, and so forth. They need practical experience more than anything at the moment, if there’s anything you need, you can let Mak’ra or De’muel know and they will assist you accordingly.”

Mak’ra makes a small wave with his hand when everyone’s attention turns to him.

“There are also some construction techniques I’ve learned from my family archives recently, so you can...”

The gathering becomes larger and larger as more people come over to see what the commotion is about, the group revised the plan continuously until Kun had to log out.

\* \* \* \* \*

“Morning.”

“Morning. What are you doing with that basket?”

“Didn’t you know? We’ve a [Namakemono Chicken] coop now.”

“Oh?! I can’t wait to have some bread with one of their soft-boiled egg.”

“Geez, all you men are gluttons.”

“Pffft, as if you won’t gorge yourself given the chance.”

\*beeda\*

The woman with the basket pulls down one of her eyelids and sticks her tongue out at her friend before walking toward the rope-covered area of the woods with the sun sneaking its way up the horizon.

She swings the large basket over her head and slides the basket toward her back, until the handle is in a position where she can bite it with her mouth. She ignores the reinforced wooden door at the ground level and instead climbs up a ladder on the side.

The builders obviously know what they were doing as they trimmed the large branches from the trees within the roped area, forcing the female [Namakemono Chicken]s to nest at the elevated balcony made at the top of the wooden boards.

The worker undoes the latches on the wooden panel and makes her way onto the balcony area within the ropes. She looks at the roosts, dropping her jaws in disbelief. The basket drops further down, threatening to choke her. She quickly untangles the basket before letting out an “EEHHHHHHHHH?!” Causing a chorus of \*kokko\* and a mass of feathers to drift down onto the forest floor below.

Clutches of eggs threaten to overflow from each roost, with each egg being the size of an adult's fist. She quickly inspects an egg by picking it up and holds it toward the rising sun. She closes her right eye and focuses with her left as she looks for the telltale sign of a fertilized egg. She repeats it for each egg, and for each egg that turns a positive, the entire roost follows. She makes a mental note before placing them back into their respective roost. The unfertilized eggs are placed inside the basket until it's full. Unfortunately, the basket only holds about 20 eggs, so it quickly ran out of space.

By the time she finished her work, 3 out of the 13 roosts were fertilized. Out of nearly 100 eggs, 22 of them have the telltale sign of fertilization.

\*Mnnnnn\*

She lets out a groan as she stands up, stretching her back as she does so. "This is insane, we are going to need more people and more coops at this rate..."

\* \* \* \* \*

\*patan patan patan\*

"A little deeper for this set of trenches please!"

"Yes, Sir!"

"Please, I'm younger than you all..." The bull-horned youth brings a hand up, waving it as to dismiss the title, before whispering "by a lot." quietly.

"You are our senior in farming though!"

“Yeah, even the Maned group said you taught them some stuff, and they were farmers before joining the army!”

“I’ve never seen this type of farming as well, and I’ve seen a lot!”

\*pon\*

A hand pats the youth on the shoulder, causing him to turn around. “Loosen up De’muel, you are doing a great job.”

“Rick-sensei! Um... I’m still not used to ordering these people around...” De’muel pushes his thick index fingers together, making them bounce as he stares at them.

“Now you know how I feel teaching you all! Don’t worry, you will get used to it, these guys respect knowledge, right guys?!”

“Damn right!”

“Why don’t you learn some farming too, Headmaster?!”

Rick takes a step back from the unexpected invite. “No thanks! I eh... have other things to do!”

“Like headbutting those chickens?”

\*ahahahahahaha\*

The blonde youth hangs his head before snapping it back up. “Maybe I shall tell them to just trade them all for travel rations.”

“Noooooooooooo! We are sorry!”

“We were just kidding!”

“Have mercy!”

Rick makes a pose with his nose pointed upward as the caninoids play

along while De'muel becomes even more flustered by the scene.

"All jokes aside, I'm just letting you know that the trade to Sardon has been confirmed last night, we will ship out in a few days. So delegate your tasks and come join us later when you are done. You and Mak'ra are going to be in charge of the caravan."

"Ehhhh?" De'muel's eyes go wide in surprise, with a sparkle mixed in.

"The proposals you two made are going to be put into action."

"Really?! Shouldn't you senseis do the trading?"

"Nope, we are teaching you guys to be self-sustainable, so you all have to do it and experience it yourself. See you in a bit." Rick turns to the workers digging in the fields, "we will be having some experimental courses for dinner! Those interested, please register at the cafeteria before dinner prep gets started!"

The blonde youth walks off toward the group that's training on evasion. Smoothly, he shoots something invisible from a small, stringless bow and send several students flying from a sudden gust of wind. De'muel can't help but smile at the given opportunity while looking onto the chaos his sensei is causing for the evasion class.

"Okay guys, finish up! I'm going to talk to the Maned group later and have them lead you guys afterward!"

"Aye, Sir!"

De'muel hangs his head with his eyes closed, giving up on correcting them.

---

\* \* \* \* \*

\*sha sha sha sha sha\*

A stream of dry leaves tumbles into itself like Ouroboros while it suspends itself in mid air over a roaring fire, I carefully control the air current to keep it stable.

[T/N: Ouroboros is a snake that's eating its own tail]

“Okay, next batch. How many do we have left?”

“About 6 more Till-neechn.”

“Okay, get the next basket ready.”

I direct the stream of leaves into a large, mounted, wooden funnel laid on its side at the other side of the room. At the end of the funnel, a large cloth bag is tied to the opening with a piece of rope.

Two young demihumans with stout bodies and ringed tails busy themselves by using a shovel to move the leaves into the end of the tunnel, occasionally reaching in to remove an odd burnt leaf every now and then.

“Ready, Till-neechn.” Another party of demihumans with ringed tails carries a straw basket between the two of them. Unlike their two brothers, these girls have slender, elongated bodies, with the only similarity being their tails.

“Alright, let's go.”

I focus my eyes on the space underneath the basket, the girls slowly tilt

the basket forward as soon as they felt the breeze I just summoned. They shake and tilt the basket forward slowly to let the leaves catch the draft without overburdening it, until the basket is empty. The stream of leaves gathers into a ball over the fire, resuming the Ouroboros dance that's necessary to cure the leaves.

The boys finish their task and are busy tying up the bag that's as big as they are. They quickly get another empty bag and refasten the rope for the next batch.

\*kara\*

I can hear the door opening and shutting. Whoever it is has the courtesy not to interrupt us. The faint smell of lemon zest and burning fills the air again. A deep red colour paints the wall opposite from the open window, I finally notice the time and decide to stop after this batch.

"Alright, we will finish the rest tomorrow."

I break the circular stream of air and direct it at the funnel again. Obediently, the leaves follow suit. The boys start their routine while the girls are setting the remaining basket of sun-dried leaves onto the proper racks and generally tidying up the place. I turn toward the still silent visitor, recognizing the loveable idiot with blonde hair. "Hey Rick-ni~."

"Hey yourself kiddo, is that how you guys make those tea leaves? Wish they'd have them where I am, all they have are those bitter beans, ark." He makes an expression as though he can taste it. I can't help but smile at that.

"Hmm... I will see if I can send some your way, Rick-ni~"

“Heh, I’m just kidding kiddo, don’t worry about that.” He turns toward the siblings before giving them a nod. “Wash your hands and get to the cafeteria, we’ve some new stuff for you guys to try.”

“Yayyyy~” The girls were the first out the door while the boys quickly finish their task and tie up the bag. They double-check to make sure the bag is secure before running toward the door. Abruptly, one of the boys stops in front of Rick-ni and asks “will there be more of those ‘tralicks’?”.

“It’s trail-mix, t-r-a-i-l, m-i-x see my lips, a-i-l. And m-i-x, Mmmm-ix”

“T-r-a-i-r m-i-xx” The boy tries to imitate Rick-ni with a lisp.

“Ah, close enough. Yeah, I think both De’muel and Mak’ra said they have a new batch.” Rick-ni gives the boy a rub on his head before sending him on his way.

“Rick-ni is starting to look like a proper sensei now~”

“Haha, come on, these rascals aren’t even rea-...” Rick-ni stops mid-sentence while scrunching his brows.

Not bothering to wait for his train of thought to complete, I tell him, “let’s go to the cafeteria already,” before walking past him and exiting through the door.



# Small Preparations

There's only two meals a day for those that live on Amoaltz. This is due to the fewer amount of hours in a day and the unique bio-rhythm of the creatures living on it. The Academy is no exception. A hearty "brunch" is their first meal while a "dinner" will be served at night, with numerous single snack-sized servings of food throughout the day. Due to the sudden population growth within the academy, a cafeteria was constructed to handle the food production necessary to feed the literal army. To alleviate the stress on the kitchen, individuals can sign up for meals at their preferred time within the 3 available time slots - early, normal, late- and the kitchen staff will include their share during preparation. Normally, the schedule is fixed permanently unless there's a request for a change. But tonight is an exception.

"What smells so good...?"

"Argh, I'm so hungry..."

"You are an early eater eh? Poor guy. Have some bread first!"

"No way...! You are just trying to trick me!"

The cafeteria is beyond full capacity, all the long benches are packed, as well as the smaller round tables. A normal dining session would usually fill it to around 3/4ths of the way. But due to the option of the 4th slot tonight, the other serving periods were quieter than usual while the last slot requires additional chairs and tables placed outside the building to accommodate everyone.

\*koho\*

"Hello everyone! I'm 'm 'm 'm..." \*koho\* "I'm Mak'ra, I will be your host tonight. The dishes tonight will come in courses, there will be a

lot more dishes than usual, but the servings will be smaller. Please-"

"Food!"

"Food!"

"Shut up and give us food already!"

The crowd at the tables shouts, stomps and hammers the tables in unison.

\*KEHO\*

Someone behind Mak'ra coughs with a deep, loud voice, the crowd immediately silences themselves after recognizing their commander. Once the voices quiet down, the man nods toward the youth.

"Please give us any opinion that you have. Thank you."

As soon as he finished speaking, a line of cooks and helpers appear from the double door of the kitchen from front of the building. Each of them is carrying a large, shallow, round wooden containers of some sort. Each of these individuals walks to the front of a bench, takes the dish from whoever is sitting down and serves the food to them. For the smaller table, the individual will move from one table to the next until all food is served. Due to the smaller portions, the train of cooks and helpers never stops, slowing down only between sets. The foods are served at the table in front of them, so the crowd never bothers to cause a ruckus again.

Most of the students of the Academy were seated near the front, since they are younger and are basically children, the men and women of the brigade had no issue with it. To be accurate, they had to consciously hold their enthusiasm back in order not to scare the students when they were working together. Meals were often served in 3-4 sets regardless of brunch and dinner, they consisted of an "opener", usually a

fruit or salad. A light “soft and moist” course consisting of potherbs, light meat, potages, or broth. An optional “heavy” course for richer food such as red meat, hard to digest vegetables, roasts, and so forth. Finally, a “closer” which consists of aged cheese, wine, and other foods that aid in digestion.

[T/N: Wowee... get to learn about medieval meal times o.O Potherbs were pretty much any plants that can be thrown into the pot, this includes things like wild flowers. Potherbs are mixed together into one pot and boiled until they are soft and tender. ????? -Potage- can be anything from porridge, thick soup to full on stews. The main requirement really is “thick liquid”.]

The courses being served, in order, are: Herbs and lettuce dosed with herb vinegar, honeyed dry fruits with trail mix, egg white porridge, zinnia flower chicken stew, wild flower and root vegetable stew, steamed minced meat leaf-dumplings, roasted minced meatloaf served in a leaf, hardboiled egg in tea, grilled vegetable and meat, meat and vegetable between two piece of baked dough, nuts and grain casserole, ale with prepared bone chips and marrows, shredded preserved vegetables, wine with a sliver of old **Sardonian** sheep cheese, apple soaked in diluted sweet wine vinegar, and finally a small cup of tea.

The expressions on the diners' face range from tear-eyed elation to confused looks. The students on the other hand are happily eating their food.

“What is this?”

“I don’t know, but it’s pretty good.”

“If you don’t want it, I’ll take.”

“No way!”

“Is this [Namakemono] egg in this porridge?”

“Damn, I want more!”

“But where did the yolk go though?”

“Stop crying you idiot!”

“Bu--but I am eaffing lighe a noble... I'mm efen eaffg a flowa...”

“And I ate like a peasant since I joined you guys! Who cares! But what's with this hardboiled egg...”

“Woah! Is this supposed to be so crunchy?”

“And it's so rich, it's like I'm eating a nut stuffed egg!”

“Hey, you guys... what are we supposed to do with the bones?”

“I think we are supposed to just eat it...?”

...

The meal ended without a hitch, the kitchen staff starts clearing the table while the diners lazily shuffle out the front door. Something seems to be blocking the passage of the door though as the diners march out slowly in a single file.

“So what's the occasion Mak'ra?” Rick asks while drinking his second cup of tea.

“No occasion, this is from Bell-sensei's lessons um... ‘market restock’?”

“‘Market Research’.” De'muel corrects him while nibbling on the pre-served vegetables.

“Right, ‘Market Research’. Excuse me a moment.” Mak'ra heads towards the kitchen for a few moments before coming out and heading toward the front door as the line of diners dwindles. De'muel excuses himself as well as he heads toward Mak'ra.

“What is this... ‘Market Research’, if you don’t mind me asking?” Sekn, who happens to be sitting at the same bench as them, asks with curiosity. Echo stops licking his fingers and turns toward his commander, likely due to the same curiosity.

“It’s eh... umm...”

“It’s a practical experiment to extrapolate data to perform a hypothesis in regards to demands~”

Till stops nibbling her small cube of cheese to help the stammering youth. “Pretty much to see what will likely sell.”

“Wait... they don’t have a contract with a merchant guild to bring goods to them?”

“Nope, they are on their own~”

The two caninoids show a shocked expression. Before they can say anything, a fairy-like student immediately unfolds some vellums on the table after his companions clear it. He gives a bow before grabbing some plates from a nearby table and disappears back into the kitchen. Mak’ra comes waddling with a large wooden board with De’muel helping him, setting it carefully on the table with a soft “ka”.

“Till-ne, I think we should bring some [Namakemono] eggs, zinnia flower, earthnut and earthnut root along with the tea.”

The girl merely waits, taking her cue, De’muel takes over for the younger Mak’ra.

“Out of the um... ‘exit survey’, the egg related dishes were ranked highly. And eh...” The bull-horned youth inspects the board quickly before resuming. “The zinnia chicken was well liked for its novelty and

smell. The earthnut was noted for ‘tasty and filling’. The vinegars might be good too, but we don’t have enough at the moment.”

“You don’t have to tell me anything, we said we would leave it to you two, so do what you think is best, okay~?”

An odd, heartwarming scene of an older sibling watching over their younger siblings with a caring smile can be felt, the odd part being the supposedly older one looking much younger than the rest.

\* \* \* \* \*

“Take care~! Just send a message back here if you need anything~”

“Just remember everything we taught you, you guys should be fine.”

“Bye Niichan!”

“Remember to bring us some souvenirs!”

“Trairmixx!”

“No Daun, it wouldn’t be a souvenir if we can make it here.”

“Ohhhhh...”

De’muel, Mak’ra, the students from the “bagged traveller” class, as well as several fox-eared soldiers, acting as escort and security, are gathered at the front of the Academy, preparing to leave.

“Bye everyone, we will be back in a month!”

“Be good okay? Listen to Dosnak and Isnic, otherwise no souvenirs for anyone.”

“De’muel-ni, we are ready.”

“Okay, let’s go Sammy.”

\*kero kero\*

The two carts advance steadily away, with Sammy pulling the leading cart with a custom-made rein. 6 Gray Cadejos, with 3 on each side of the carts, mounted by fox-eared demihumans, escort them.

Dosnak, Isnic, Rick, Till, and the rest of the students continue waving until the group disappears into the morning mist. Shortly after, all the students went to get their morning snack before starting their class and work.

“Rick-ni, I’ll be busy for a little while, but I will still log in once a day~ Leave me a message if you need anything, okay~?”

“Geez, Bell’s stuck with work again and we still have no idea when Kun’s going to get back. Guess I’ll have to hold the fort until then.”

“Don’t worry Rick-ni, I will only take a few days~”

“Got it, kiddo.”

The two go their separate way after the short talk, with Rick going off to start one of his lessons while Till goes to log out in her room.

\* \* \* \* \*

\*Mmmmmnnnnnn\*

I stand up after getting off the bed and give myself a stretch. I woke well before sunrise to see Makki and De’mmy off, the time difference between the day and night cycle can be a hassle at times. It seems mom didn’t come back home last night, but that’s to be expected since she said there’s going to be some new features coming in for **Second Phantasia**. I get to my desk and turn on the lamp and the UV light on the lowest setting. Getting a few more books from the bookshelf, I pile

them neatly on the longer arm of the L shaped desk.

*Hmm... Right, I was here yesterday. Now to build up my vocabulary.*

I put aside the opened book on the desk as I sit down, making sure I bookmarked the correct pages. The computer that's on the shorter arm of the table gets a tap before coming to life. I request various information in English via audio command after it finished loading. Various tabbed icons appear on the search engine, I randomly tap one of them to begin my study. Words with pictures are lined up on the monitor.

[T/N: The following was originally in English]

“Pronoun and verb pair. He is. She is. They are. We are. Negative form. Is not. Are not...”

...

“Colour. Red. Orange. Yellow. Green. Blue. Indigo. Purple...”

...

“Fruit. Apple. Banana. Currant. Date. Elderberries. Fig...”

...

“Metal. Aluminum. Bismuth. Brass. Bronze. Cadmium. Cobalt. Copper. Gold. Iron. Lead. Lithium. Nickel. Platinum. Silver. Steel. Tin...”

...

\*pipi pipi\*



The alarm clocks on both the computer and the desk ring at the same time. I pause my study and turn the alarms off.

\*Mmmnnnnnn\*

I stand up from the chair and stretch myself before heading to the kitchen. Filling a pot with water, I set it to boil. I peer into the refrigerator before grabbing a pack of shirataki, some preserved vegetables, and a pre-prepped slice of fish set in a ceramic container. Following the instructions on the container, I fill the ceramic container with the fish, with a centimeter of water, set it next to the pot of boiling water, and turn on the heat. I then open the pack of noodles and put into the boiling water. \*fuuu\* I sigh as I think of the cheese from the night of the market research and the food Kun-ni made, I can only curse silently at my own body. The body that is unable to handle the so called excitable food. Shaking my head to clear away the depressing thoughts, I start a mental review of the English language.

[T/N: Shirataki is noodles made from the root of the Konjac plant, aka Devil's Tongue. The more well known form of food from this plant would be konnyaku and fruit jelly with a cube of nata de coco in the center.]

\*biiiiiiiiii\*

The unique sound of the ceramic container's "completion" snaps me back to reality. I quickly turn off the heat for the pot and the container before draining them with a colander. I put the drained, bland food onto a shallow plate and place a serving of preserved vegetable on it before starting my bland tasting meal.

I chew my food thoroughly and quickly to get it over with. Making quick work of the clean up, I resume my studies. I started learning

english just the other day, I hope to finish learning by the day after. I still don't understand why people felt the need to have multiple languages, it seems so inefficient and stupid. I vent my frustration to thin air as I sigh again. I still need to learn market theories, merchant laws and a bunch of other stuff. I better hurry if I am to fulfill my promise anytime soon.

\* \* \* \* \*

\*shu\* \*zudon\* \*shu\* \*zudon\* \*shu\* \*zudon\*

A youth is throwing balls of ice at a large target 15 meters away. The archers training nearby had stopped their shooting a while back and watched with interest, their tails waving all the while. It would be nothing special if the youth is merely throwing them straight on, but the balls of ice rarely travel in a straight line. There are balls that travel in a curved path. There are balls that look to be thrown to the side or above the target that will cut sharply before striking the target, the strangest ones seems to break in the opposite direction of the ball's lateral direction. The distance is insignificant to the bow and arrow, but the amount of control being displayed mesmerizes everyone who sees it.

"What's the Headmaster doing?"

"No clue, but how do the ice blocks move like that?"

"Is it magic?"

"No... I don't sense any spells at all."

Rick winds up again, except this time, it's an underhanded pitch that's pitched from ankle height. The ball of ice climbs gradually in a straight line with a \*shu\*, reaching its peak of 3 meters before diving diagonally downward toward the target. In a smooth motion, after the initial pitch, Rick spins around using the pitch's momentum and winds up

again while spinning before releasing an overhand pitch with a sharper \*shu\* than the one before.

\*zudon\* \*zudon\*

The pitches hit the target a split second apart, with the first pitch hitting the top of the target while the second ones hit below it around knee height.

\*fuuuuuuuuuu\*

The youth breathes out a long breath before wiping the sweat from his forehead with his hand.

\*pachi pachi\*

The watching caninoids start clapping after the end of the display.

“Eh...? Ehhhhhhh.....?” The blonde youth turns red unexpectedly and starts scratching the back of his head with a “what the hell is going on” expression.

One of the older caninoid archers approaches him from another lane, “Headmaster Rick.”

The youth looks ill at ease as everyone seems to focus on him and the middle-aged archer. He squawks out an odd “Yes?” before coughing and correcting himself with a more dignified “Yes?”.

“What was it that you were doing? It looked like you were battling... yet... not.”

“Ah... It’s a sport in my country. It’s um...” Rick crosses his arm and

scrunches his eyebrows as he tries to explain it. The impromptu audience waits patiently for his response. “Ah! It’s a mock battle between a thrower and a defender.”

“A thrower?”

“Tsk! It’s like, okay, you are the archer, you are trying to kill someone important that’s represented by the target. The defender is someone that’s standing between you and the target and tries to block your shot. Now, replace bow and arrow with balls or stones and sling. Although the sling version hasn’t been played in years.”

“Oh! I see, so Headmaster Rick is a warrior even at home?”

“Eh? What? No, no, it’s a sport! It’s played for entertainment!”

“Headmaster is a gladiator?”

“Wow, no wonder he’s a Headmaster at such a young age!”

“Well, his group did give [Cerebus] trouble...”

“... You guys didn’t hear a word I said... Did you...?” \*fuuu\* Rick sighs and slumps his shoulders before retreating from the small, gossipy crowd. The older gentleman that was talking to him is silent with a contemplating expression.

Rick goes on a quick tour of the Academy grounds to make sure everything is in order. Aside from delegating some students to help with the [Namakemono Chicken] and the expansion of the new coops, there was nothing else that was pressing. Happy that everything is in order, he heads to his assigned room within the top floor of the academy before logging out.

Rick gets up from the bed in his 3rd story studio apartment and jumps in space a few times to loosen up. He quickly uses the washroom to do his business, combs his hair in the mirror and changes into a set of shirt and shorts. He pours a glass of water from the pitcher on the small dining table, drinks it, grabs his keys and exits his apartment. After locking up, he starts a slow jog down the exposed hallway and takes in the late morning sun. He stops and does some light stretches at the bottom of the apartment complex before starting his daily routine from a few weeks ago.

# Trial and Tribulation (Up/First)

\*Fuuuu\*

*Damn it, why do I have to deal with her?*

I sigh and mentally grumble while waiting for my aunt to show up at the port terminal. She's well known for being a pain in the ass. I think that's why my parents made me go to pick her up instead of sending their chauffeur.

About an hour past the arrival time, she finally shows up with a pair of porters behind her. With her blond hair tied tight into a bun, form-fitting business attire, rectangle spectacles, and a stern, passive expression, she's the very definition of serious. I wave my hand weakly to catch her attention before walking toward the parked car my parents sent me to pick her up with.

[T/N: Was so tempted to change stern, passive expression into "resting bitch face" ;P]

\*pan\*

\*uuuuuuu\*

The familiar sound of her fingers snapping and the groans of protest from anyone that's required to help her arrives on cue as I turn my back. Like my dad and the rest of his side of the family, she's also working as a diplomat. She has just returned from a mission in Matane with the United Maritime Nations that's known for speaking a myriad of languages. Rumour has it that all the different leaders all said the same thing about her, "old, stubborn woman" before she was

sent back.

\*gacha\*

I open the back door of the car to allow the porters to place the various pieces of luggage with a chorus of \*dosa\* as they pile them atop one another, filling up all of the back seats and leg space in the car.

\*pon\*

One of the porters gives me a pat on the shoulder and gives me a pitying smile as his partner receives money from my aunt. I simply sigh with a \*fuuuu\* and nod with my eyes closed. Even though we've only just met, we already share a bond of having to deal with an insufferable woman. The porter quickly walks away as soon as his partner finished receiving the payment.

“Not a word of greeting? Didn't my sister-in-law teach you any manners?”

I resist the urge to roll my eyes at her as I went with a “hello, Aunt Quinn” before entering the driver seat. I dread the drive back as well as the family dinner we will be having tonight.

\* \* \* \* \*

“What in the...?”

I finally get to log in after 3 days' worth of absence due to my aunt's arrival, that should be about 5 days in-game. “What the hell happened here?” leaks from my mouth as I watch a strange spectacle unfolding before my eyes as I step out from the Academy. In the open fields where the old hag tortured us when we were level 0, arrows are flying

haphazardly non-stop. Some of students are dodging them as they come down while the wanwans are actually receiving arrows. After a while, the ones dodging and blocking will switch equipment and start shooting the other side, who changed into defensive equipment. There were a few injured people getting treated in the sidelines while cheering.

[T/N: Wan is the japanese sound of a dog's bark. So wanwans is Rick's way of referring to the demihuman soldiers. "Doggy" sounds demeaning in english, while wanwan is more like a childish term of endearment. So I opted to keep wanwan]

"Welcome back Rick-sensei. Would you like me to get you some tea?"

"Um... wah... umm... yes, please." I stammer as I fumble out of my confusion to the bushy-tailed student that spotted me. I think she's part of Kun's cooking class...

"Right away." The girl gives a quick bow before heading back inside. Shortly after, Isnic and the girl return with trays of tea, utensils and snacks.

"Welcome back, Rick-sensei."

I give Isnic a quick wave to acknowledge her greeting and help them put the trays down onto one of the benches lining the entrance of the building. The other girl gives a quick bow before reentering the building.

"What's going on here...?" I point at the arrows that are flying all over the place.

"Eh? Isn't this a training game from sensei's hometown?"



“Wait... what...?”

“That’s what those uncles and aunties from the archery range said.”

I smack my forehead with a \*ba\* as I realize what has happened. They took the training I was doing and adopted it for their own use. Originally, the game that was recorded to have been played before the Age of Chaos was called “baseball”. It required numerous players, large fields and some specialized equipment. Some scholars tried to revive the game within some university campuses almost a century ago, they failed horribly and succeed amazingly. The game was too slow paced and considered as boring by many, but there were plenty of tactical uses within the game itself.

Some military types of the time simplified the game down into 2 to 4 players as a military exercise. The “pitcher” is replaced with a ranged attacker while the “batter” is replaced with a defender to intercept the projectiles with their arsenal at hand. The “attacker” gets a point for each successful hit on the target, the optional auxiliary player, or on any exposed part of the defender. The Atlantic Union adopted the game and added various rules and regulations to promote the game as a sport. Now it’s a professional sport played within a large cage watched by thousands during any given match. The cage is there to prevent stray balls from hitting the audience. Although, there was a rumour of an assassination attempt somewhere in the past. Regardless, it was one of my passions growing up, I was even good at it prior to my injury. I am now training to try and get a scholarship into a nearby university, after giving up a while ago. I never expected the game to appear within a fantasy game.

I absentmindedly nibble on the dried fruits and drink the tea as I watch the spectacle. After finishing up the pot of tea, someone else got

injured on the field. An idea clicks in my head and I quickly get up from the bench.

“Sorry! Please clean this up!”

I start running toward the injured person, I think Isníc gave me a funny look, but I’m not too sure and this certainly isn’t the time to be worrying about that. I arrive on the scene shortly, as I expected, it’s one of the students from the evasion class. Fortunately, the wound looks worse than it is. At least they had the common sense to use blunted wooden arrows, which only seems to be causing some minor bleeding and bruising.

“Whose idea was it to be doing this?”

The gathered crowd looks uncomfortably at one another before the older uncle from the archery range wades to the front of the crowd.

“That would be me.”

\*fuuuuuu\*

*How should I handle this? Argh, why isn’t anyone else here? Why didn’t Till stop them? Argggghhhh...*

After sighing, I realize that they are probably just trying to help the students with the training while keeping it fun. So I can’t exactly blame them for any mishaps, and they did blunt the arrows... “It looks like I didn’t explain the rules of the game. You need to erect some nets around so no one accidentally gets shot. Also, give all the ones that are doing the dodging some extra padding, it might slow them down a little, but it will make sure they can keep training instead of being set aside after getting injured.”

“Oh... right... I didn’t think of that.” The uncle replies sheepishly while the rest of the wanwans look a little embarrassed. Guess they must have gotten too excited to think straight.

“Blah, forget it, let’s set up some rules and equipment. At least no one received any serious injury, right?”

The wanwans nod while the students look around with confusion on their face. Just how trusting are you guys? Then I remember how we were tricked... I don’t really have the right to criticize others... Do I? I start giving orders to everyone after I made sure the injured student got sent to the infirmary. The inspections can wait, nothing good can come out of dampening the mood without doing something to fix it.

\* \* \* \* \*

“De’muel-ni, is this really the right place? It’s just an empty field... we can barely see the Merchant Quarters from here...” A teen with a rat-tail and a rat’s tail asks from inside the cart as they meander their way away from the paved road and onto the dirt road. It’s approaching noon as the sun slowly rises toward its peak.

De’muel checks the map and recalls the directions given by the guards at the gate when they were paying the import tax. “This is the right place. Let’s set up camp and secure the goods.”

Including De’muel and Mak’ra, there’s a total of 10 people that traveled on the carts with the goods. This makes a total of 16 people if the escorts are to be included. The field looks to be a barren, uneven piece of land filled with weeds, likely unsuitable for farming. There are some signs of prior construction with a trench that’s now filled with vegetation, they must have tried to find a use for this piece of land and

failed to do so. The only reason why this sort of land is within the city's wall is likely due to its location between the castle and the farmlands.

Raising his voice, the youth turns toward one of the fox-eared escorts. “Captain! We will be setting up camp here!”

The demihuman on the lead cadejo nods and immediately starts giving orders to her subordinates. Breaking the hexagon formation, two of them, one on each side of the carts, remain mounted, while the rest dismount and start digging a shallow ditch somewhere in the field, away from the road. The soil is hard and uneven with rocks of various size mixed in. Likewise, the teenagers from the carts, led by De'muel and Mak'ra, find the flattest section of the field next to the dirt road and start making a shallow ditch in the form of a square.

Taking the cart that Sammy is pulling and all the empty barrels as a result of paying the import tax, two of the escorts head toward the well near the Merchant Quarters while the captain and the remaining escort remount their steeds, forming a large square formation with the two still mounted escorts.

By the time the escorts get back, the teenagers just managed to complete their second square-shaped ditch, connecting to their first one.

“Mak'ra, you and Kalmi go help the escorts. Me and Laum will clear these, the rest of you, get the boards ready.”

The group splits apart, most head back to the carts to pick up some ropes and boards. The deer-horned youth, leading a still younger ram-horned youth, head to the area where the scouts are carrying the barrels of water to.

“«Flame».” De'muel starts setting the weeds within the second square

on fire. As soon as the flame starts burning, he uses the same spell to set the first square -surrounded by the ditch- on fire as well. A stone's throw away, smoke is starting to rise into the air as well.

"De'muel-ni, we are all done setting up the boards."

"Alright, then start setting up the campfire with your partner and get the others to take care of the ca-" \*keho\* \*keho\* "Shoot, «Breeze»!" A gentle gust of air fans the flame slightly while pushing away the smoke to the side where no one is standing. \*keho\* After coughing and getting some fresh air, the bull-horned youth resumes. "Get the others to take care of the carts and the horses."

Farmers and guards from the Merchant Quarters shows up as the smoke raises with concern on their face. The farmers see the demihumans setting fire to the field and wanted to stop them, but their common sense told them to not get involved seeing that the fire seems to be in control. Yet... they couldn't help themselves and gawk at the demihumans from a distance, as this is the first time they've seen so many demihumans gathered together. Even a noble can only employ one or two demihumans due to their cost. Since there doesn't seem to be any hostilities, the escorts merely tighten the formation in case they've to respond to something.

"What's going on here?" A fat, blonde youth, leading a squad of city guards holding short spears, approaches one of the mounted escorts to ask a question.

"One moment, I'll get my captain." \*Fiiiiiiii\* The escort whistles sharply with his fingers before waving at the rider in another corner.

The rider gives him a signal before heading over. As soon as the captain arrives, the escort trods away to replace her spot. "Something the

matter, gentlemen?”

\*gokun\*

The guards gulp visibly when she starts speaking as her voice was as fine and unique as her appearance. The one leading them seem to maintain his composure somewhat and asks “what’s going on here?”

“We are setting up camp here.”

“What does that have to do with committing arson?”

“Watch your tongue boy, if you know anything about setting camp for long stays, you wouldn’t be asking that.”

“I’m not a boy! And you and your lot are under arrest for committing arson within the **Sardonian** capital!”

\*hahahaha\*

“You throwing a tantrum is proof that you are indeed a boy. And by whose authority are you going to arrest us with?”

\*kuku\* The rest of the guards try to stifle their laughter while the fat youth’s face turns red and he snarls, reaching for his sword. De’muel arrives next to the Captain of his escorts since he started walking when the previous rider whistled. An almost inaudible \*shin\* accompanies his arrival.

“Why you, if I don’t throw you into the dungeon for setting fire on my father’s land, my name isn’t Nikolas Donavic!”

“Boy, draw that sword and you will regret it.” The captain says it with a

flat tone of voice and narrowing her eyes while her cadejo starts snarling, revealing its fangs. Some of the farmers start running away while the guards each take a step back as everyone just assumed the mounts are merely hairy horses. Some of them start preparing their stance with their spear lowered.

\*dottaa\*

The fat youth falls over backward spectacularly when he tries to draw out his sword, his leg flying forward and up from the force of him trying to unsheathe his weapon.

“Hold it! What’s going on here?” De’muel’s unexpectedly loud voice stalls the commotion. “Captain?”

“The fat kid here says he’s going to arrest us for committing arson on his father’s land.”

“Eh...?” De’muel looks at the fallen youth with discerning eyes. “He isn’t a prince that I know of, but we have permission from the king to use the land as we please anyways.” He quickly prepares the vellum with the king’s seal on it, one of the guards raises his spear up before walking cautiously forward to inspect the sheepskin. The guard checks the seal before looking at the rest of the document. He alternates his gaze between the horns on the lean, muscular youth’s head standing in front of him and the document. The fallen fat youth has gotten up with the help of the guards in the mean time.

“Um... Sir, the document is genuine. His Majesty conditionally loaned the field to them for trading purposes.”

The youth’s angry red face suddenly turns pale, the guards start looking at each other, unsure as to what to do.

“That is all for today! Get your lazy asses back to your posts!” The youth starts screaming angrily at his men as he tries to stomp away.

“So that means your name is Fat Ass from now on?” The Captain raises her voice loudly for everyone to hear.

“Eh... the fat kid’s name is Fat Ass, Captain? These humans have strange naming senses... Careful on your way back everyone, Fat Ass!”

\*kukukukukuku\*

The youth can do nothing but storm off, redder than ever from anger and humiliation while the guards struggle the entire way to hold back their laughter. It’s already well known that their incompetent leader only got his job with the help of his father, so there’s literally no respect for him from the guards.

\*hehe\*

During the commotion, some kids from somewhere started playing with the giant ball of fur, otherwise known as Sammy, near where the horses are tied to. Their light laughs only now reach everyone’s ears. The farmers were the first to react by running to the kids and dragging them away while bowing repeatedly all the while.

\* \* \* \* \*

Things have quieted down after the first day’s chaos. The burnt ground was flattened with stomping boards after being temporarily frozen with «Frozen Javelin». The purpose was to break the ground down with the changes in temperature while sterilizing the area, killing all the pests and roots to prevent them from growing back. The ditch is to



serve as a minor anti-theft feature as well as drainage to divert any water away from the tents and direct it into the preexisting trench. Four tents were erected, two tents were pitched near the road; holding the sales tent and a resting tent. A few meters away, two more tents were erected, holding yet another resting area and the storage area for the goods. Between the two sets of tents, a makeshift campfire had been made by the two responsible for cooking. Like the smokeless fire taught by Kun, the fire pit is a flat-bottom U shaped hole. Above the hole, where the fire is made, stands a metal stand made with three rods tied at the top, a wooden bucket would dangle from a rope to boil their water and food.

The Captain gave out instructions to her team at dinner that night, the escorts would patrol the area in two sets: The first set would patrol for 6 hours before switching out with another, the second would do the same except 3 hours after the first set have started. This is to prevent any potential gaps from forming during shift change.

The following day, De'muel tries talking to the various shopkeepers that are on the main road within the Merchant Quarters. In each instance, they would talk with him in a friendly manner at first before telling him to go away when he asks if they would be willing to buy his goods. Undeterred, he goes on to try the smaller shops within the Merchant Quarters. He draws stares every now and then, but it is something that he's already been used to a long time ago. He already covered almost half the Merchant Quarters by the time the sun is starting to set and the shops start to close down for the night. Walking back toward the tents, he hears the occasional laughter of children before it disappears along with the sun. De'muel reports his lack of success while Mak'ra reports that not a single buyer visited them today, the only visits came from the neighbourhood kids bothering Sammy and the horses.

Going into the Merchant Quarters the first thing the next morning, De'muel continues where he last left off. He somewhat expects more of the same treatment as that of yesterday's, but it didn't prepare him for what is yet to come.

“Get out!”

...

"No."

...

“Get out of here!”

...

"You are not welcomed here, don't come back again."

Each time he tries to enter a shop, the shopkeeper would immediately chase him away. He was able to visit all the shops in the entire Merchant Quarters by the time brunch came around. He walks back to the tents with a frown on his face, as he can't figure out why no one would buy from him. He recalls seeing others being able to sell various things to the shopkeepers, what makes him so different? He walks into the group having brunch as he continues to think.

“Something the matter, De’muel? You are back early today.” Mak’ra turns to the bull-horned youth while eating his serving of potherbs with bits of dried meat in it.

“You want to eat, De’muel-ni?” The rat-tailed teenager with a rattail asks him while scooping out a serving for one of the off-duty escorts.

“Please, Laum. And yeah Mak’ra, do I look weird?”

““““Huh?”””” Everyone eating around the campfire turns and looks at him at the same time with a questioning look.

"Remember how I was greeted yesterday? Now I get kicked out the moment I take a step within any store in the Merchant Quarters..."

"That is strange..." Mak'ra furrows his brows.

"Well, De'muel-ni looks fine, the clothing is typical for a traveller, it can't be that."

"He's pretty good looking, it also can't be that he's ugly..."

"Maybe because he's demihuman?"

"Nah, we were fine at the other cities. They might give us strange looks every now and then, but it isn't something like thi-thisc-thiscremation?"

"You mean discrimination?"

"Yeah, that."

"Here you go, De'muel-ni." Laum hands over a serving of food in a wooden bowl with a wooden spoon.

"Thanks." De'muel starts eating the soft, tender potsherbs while mulling over the situation. "Mak'ra, you try and sell at the store after brunch is over. Just try a dozen or so, let's see what happens."

\* \* \* \* \*

"De'muel-ni, we've a problem."

"Why? What's the matter, Kalmi?" The bull-horned youth carefully rolls up the vellum that he's reading within the sales tent. He clears up the counter, which was set up using parts from the 2nd cart, and turns toward the monkey-tailed cook.

"Some of the eggs are starting to go bad. The shaking during transport might have damaged some of them."

“Damn it.” De’muel rubs his temples with his hand for a moment.  
“How many of them are there?”

“I’d say about a barrel’s worth.”

\*fuuuuu\*

The bull-horned youth sighs in dismay. “Okay, cook up all the ones that are about to go bad. Make the others in such a way that we can eat them as snacks and for brunch tomorrow.”

“Also, some of the zinnia flowers are about to go bad too.”

“Is there a lot?”

“No, just a bit.”

“Then use it with the egg.”

“Got it.” Kalmi’s tail curls into a ring in anxiousness. “Are you alright?”

“Yeah, why?”

“Don’t know, you look older by a few years all of the sudden.”

\*hahahaha\*

The youth can only smile bitterly. “Don’t worry about it. We will be having quite a bit of eggs, though.”

\*kii kii kii\*

“We will make sure you guys won’t get sick of it.” Kalmi heads back to the warehouse tent after laughing with a monkey-like sound.

\* \* \* \* \*

\*kero kero\*

“““Shh...”””

\*kero\*

“Eh...?”

“““... RUN!”””

\*keroooo\*

A number of younger kids are riding on top of Sammy while some older ones are leaning into the furry blob, sniffing the air while spying on the pair of cooks preparing the evening meal. Mak’ra’s return from the Merchant Quarters surprised the children, causing them to run. Sammy follows them a split second later, causing a wind pressure that pushes against Mak’ra. The deer-horned youth is left with a “what the hell just happened” look before shaking his head and resumes walking to the sales tent.

The escorts didn’t stop the children today since they are not bothering the horses and Sammy seems to be fine interacting with them. They would be able to jump right in if the children start any trouble, but they seem to be behaving themselves by playing simple things like Tag and OniOniCircle. Seeing that they are not a threat, the escorts simply remain on guard. It seems that the field they are occupying originally acted as a sort of playground according to the children, so De’muel

allowed them to keep playing here when informed by the escorts.

[T/N: OniOniCircle is likely referring to the Japanese version of “Red Light, Green Light” or “Go, Stop” or whatever it’s called. Oni = ?, the game is called ???, my googlefu is too weak to know if this is an actual game or is a reference to something]

“Ni-san.” Mak’ra pops inside the sales tent as the sky is dyed in orange.

“Ah, Mak’ra, any luck?”

The deer-horned youth fidgets while replying “no, something doesn’t seem right about all of this.”

“I think I know why...”

“Eh?”

“I’ve been reviewing the lessons by Bell-sensei. There is something known as ‘Economic Embargo’, ‘Market Manipulation’ and ‘Market Monopoly’.”

“Isn’t Embargo limited to countries only?”

“Yes, but the theory can be applied in this case, it’s an act of ‘Trade Protectionism’.”

“Umm... sorry ni-san, you lost me.”

“Someone or some group somewhere within this city doesn’t want us trading here.” De’muel leans on the counter, tenting his fingers while leaning on his hands.

“We aren’t that important... isn’t that too much of a conspiracy?”

“Even so, let’s assume the worst for now and let’s say that we can’t ever sell to the merchants within the Merchant Quarters.”

“But-”

“No buts, we both tried this already, you were kicked out right away from the shops, yes?”

Mak’ra’s face twitches since De’muel is right on the bullseye. “Then what are we going to do?”

“I don’t know yet, we will have a discussion with everyone over dinner.”

“Speaking of which, why are there a bunch of kids staring at our cooks?”

“... What?” The bull-horned youth packs away the vellums on the counter before walking towards the campfire where the Laum and Kalmi are preparing the night’s meal with Mak’ra right behind.

\*gokun\*

Involuntarily, De’muel gulps at the aromas drifting through the air as he approaches the two. “Hey, Laum, Kalmi. What are you guys making?”

The rat-tailed teenager with the rattail waves at his partner to keep working while stopping to talk. “Well, some of the zinnia flowers don’t look edible, but it’d be a waste to just throw them out, so we blended

the non-rotten flowers with some of the tea leaves to hardboil some eggs in it. It should help preserve it for a few days.”

“How many did you make?”

“We are going to use about 3/4 of the barrel this way. There’s simply too much egg to eat for dinner and brunch. That bunch there is done, help yourself if you are hungry right now.”

“Alright, good job.” De’muel gives the teenager a pat on the shoulder before looking around. It didn’t take long before he spots the white blob hiding behind the warehouse tent with the kids peeking at the cooks.

“Uh-oh.”

“Book it!”

“Let’s go, Sam-cham!”

Some of the kids agilely slide off the furry white blob while a few of the younger kids pull Sammy’s fur to get him to move.

“Sammy! Bring the kids over here.”

\*kero\*

“Wah! No, Sam-cham!”

“You traitor!”

“We didn’t do anything.”

Sammy obediently went around the tents and glides its way over to De’muel with three children still riding on him. In the meantime, the youth picks up an egg and starts removing the shell with a spoon before cutting them into quarters with a small sharp knife.



One of the kids starts crying upon seeing the knife.

“Please don’t eat us! We will be good!” The middle kid starts shivering while holding Sammy with a deathgrip.

“Mommy... waaaahhhh!” The other kid starts crying as well.

“BE QUIET!” De’muel puts the egg into a wooden bowl before putting the knife away. The children are shocked into silence as they look at the bull-horned youth in terror. The stories of the bull-horned demon eating naughty children appearing in their heads. “Let them down, Sammy.”

\*kero kero\*

The furry blob deflates itself as the still stunned children continue to stare at De’muel.

“Here.” The youth holds out the bowl of quartered eggs toward the snot-nosed kids. When none of them moved an inch, he let’s out a \*fuuuu\*. “You just pick it up and eat it like this.” He picks up a slice of the divided fist-sized egg and takes a bite out of it before chewing. The aroma and taste is delicious as expected, the slight citrus flavour combining with the flower’s aroma, a subtle sweetness enhancing the savoriness of the yolk while contrasting with the slight bitterness from the tea leaves. Unconsciously, he starts grabbing for another piece as he quickly devours the first piece.

\*gokun\*

All the kids snap out of it as the aroma makes them gulp, the sight of the so-called demon devouring the egg greedily makes them eye the

egg with curiosity. The middle child reaches into the still extended bowl and grabs a piece of the egg before taking a bite, as the other two kids look on. The child's eyes go wide at the flavour, a delicious flavour - unlike the heavily salted cuisine found within **Sardon**. The other two gulp upon seeing the child's reaction, splitting the remaining piece among themselves before eating it. Seeing the empty bowl, De'muel grabs a few more eggs and starts removing their shells. Since [Nakemomono] eggs have a certain thickness to its shells, it's very easy to remove them without the shell crumbling.

\*KERO\*

Before De'muel has the chance to cut up the egg, a vacuum-like gust of wind appears from nowhere and drags the egg into the still deflated Sammy.

\*Kkkkeerorororo\*

An unusual sound as though a frog is purring fills the air before the white blob deflates some more. De'muel momentarily stares at his empty hand where the egg once was before reaching over and working on another one after giving the flattened blob a wry smile.

\*ta ta ta\*

Mak'ra has been watching the sight since he followed De'muel on the way out, others within the camp arrive after hearing the commotion.

\*gokun\*

All of them are gulping from the aroma and the sight of De'muel peeling the eggshells while children are eating the eggs happily. Some of them couldn't help themselves and start removing the shell off an egg

on their own. It wasn't long before everyone, including the off-duty escorts, join in the sudden meal. Laum and Kalmi just shrug at each other as they continue to cook.

"Incoming!" An escort shouts from the direction of the Merchant Quarters. The off-duty escorts quickly toss their piece of egg into their mouth before summoning their Gray Cadejo and riding toward the voice.

\*DODODO\*

"Release the children now!" The fat, blonde youth from the first day appears again, leading his squad of city guards in full run.

"What the hell are you talking about, Fat Ass?"

"RELEASE THE CHILDREN!"

\*OO\*

The cadejos all roar at the same time, causing the very air to vibrate. This has the effect of causing all the guards to halt their run.

"I repeat, what the hell are you talking about?"

"I've a report of children being abducted and being eaten here. I'm here to save those kids from you savages! Less talking! Charge!"

"Captain, the kids are eating with the others."

"So Fat Ass is now a Dumb Ass?" The Captain sighs tiredly before giving out some quick orders. "Fall back, Circle formation, protect the kids."

The guards charge half-heartedly since they overheard that the kids are eating with the others as reported by one of the riders. Some didn't even take more than a few steps.

"You! Follow me!" Without another word, the Captain charges past the fat youth drawing his sword and nabs the guard that did the check on the document the other day. He gets unceremoniously dragged with an "aaaaahhhhh" onto the back of the cadejo before it makes a sharp turn and dashes toward the camp.

"These savages are kidnapping one of the guards! Call for backup!" The fat youth charges forward with his sword drawn as the other escorts slowly back away toward the camp after spreading out. The guards look at each other in doubt before someone finally retrieves a horn and blows in it. The "Huuuuuu" echoes through the air, causing birds in the fields nearby to take flight.

\*kan\* \*kan\* \*kan\*

The fat youth tries to slash at one of the escorts, who parries it away with a long spear without effort. The cadejo would occasionally lean in during the parry, pushing the swordsman back.

"What the hell are you idiots doing?! Attack!"

"Umm... Sir."

"WHAT?!" Nikolas turns back angrily.

The guard merely points toward the camp where their old captain is walking toward them, leading three children while holding onto something. Behind them rides the beautiful woman with a look that's

as cold as ice.

“Umm... false alarm guys.” The man wipes his mouth with his sleeve before flashing a smile. “On the other hand, you guys won’t believe what these guys are selling here.” He quickly tosses a few eggs toward his fellow guards who catch them with their hands, dropping their short spears.

The youth looks at the guard and the children in confusion.

“Weren’t they tied up and about to be eaten?”

“Sir, no, sir. They were happily eating these things with the demihuman traders at their camp, sir!”

\*gokun\*

The few guards with the eggs gulp as the aroma stirs their appetite since it’s close to dinner time. The guards quickly peel away part of the eggshell before ripping a piece out and devouring it. They quickly gesture to the other guards while chewing the piece in their mouth. The other guards, seeing that there’s no danger or incident, gather around those with the eggs and start grabbing pieces for themselves.

“What the...? That child said his friends were going to be eaten...” The fat youth mutters to himself and turns his head every which way, at the children each holding a large egg, the guard that came back, and the men that are busily devouring the eggs. A sudden shadow towers over him, the deep red setting sun giving it an eerie look. Out of the blue, a loud \*PA\* is heard followed by a dull \*Da\* sound of something falling onto the floor. The youth stares at the shadowed figure in shock.

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“Pick up the glove, Dumb Ass. I’m challenging your incompetent ass to a duel.”

# Trial and Tribulation (Middle)

The fat youth put his right hand on his struck cheek in disbelief while the Captain dismounts. Her emerald-coloured eyes shining brilliantly between narrowed slits, they are further contrasted as her figure is shadowed by the sun at her back.

\*WAAAA\*

Fueled by humiliation, fear, anger and a mix of other emotions, Nikolas rushes in with an overhand slash.

\*fyu\*

“Insolent child, didn’t anyone teach you dueling etiquette?” The Captain casually back-steps out of range of the strike and draws a weapon from within the belt, which was acting as a sheath. In the same motion, she grabs a sai that’s tucked into the same belt.

[T/N: Sai is a blunt, 3 pronged weapon used in certain eastern Martial Arts, it’s known for their strength and ability as a swordbreaker. I think Raphael from TMNT uses them if you need a reference (I don’t know my turtles that well, so it could be Michaelangelo for all I know :P]

\*fiii\*

She gives a quick, sharp whistle, causing her mount to trod off to the side. Unlike the opponent, she chose non-bladed, non-lethal weapons used for subduing someone. Holding the short, stout sai in her left hand in front while holding a drooping, semi-rigid, tapered rod in her

right over her head, she looks like a beastmaster about to tame a boar.

\*kan\*

The fat youth tries to slash his sword in an upswing as he steps forward, following his overhand strike. Unfortunately for him, the Captain also steps in and catches his sword with the sai, locking it.

\*hyu\* \*PA\* \*PA\*

In a fluent motion, she swings the upheld right hand clockwise in a semi-circle before swinging it sideways. The rod acts like a whip, swinging around the youth's side before striking him in the rear end, causing him to jump. Using this moment of weakness, she twist her left wrist and diverts the sword to the side. Once again, she swings the rod in a semi-circle, this time striking the youth's left shin.

\*kan\*

Grinding his teeth, he rushes forward with a horizontal slash from his right side. The Captain deftly flips the sai around into a backhand grip while stepping in and blocks the blade once again. Expecting this, Nikolas release his left hand from the sword and swings a backhand hammer fist at her head.

\*heh\*

Giving off a scoff, the Captain ducks while swinging the rod, striking him in the rear again. "At least you are not completely brainless. Then again, they do say pigs can be smart once in a while."

\*WAAAAAA\* \*fu-\* \*fyu\* \*fyu\* \*fyu\*



Screaming wildly, Nikolas tries to swing his left hand down to hammer her in the head while he slides his blade out of the sai by drawing it back, before unleashing a flurry of quick strikes from various angles. The Captain dodges out of the way, giving herself a wide margin.

“My turn.”

\*hyu\* \*kan\* \*PA\* \*hyu\* \*kan\* \*PA\* \*hyu\* \*kan\* \*PA\* \*hyu\* \*PA\*  
\*hyu\* \*PA\* \*hyu\* \*PA\* ...

The Captain launches three consecutive strikes with the rod -an overhand, a horizontal backhand and a downward backhand- which all ended up being blocked by the sword. But it proved futile as the tapered end of the rod swings around each time, striking the youth on the top of the head, the upper right arm and the right shin respectively. Following the third strike, she whips the rod around and smashes it into the youth's right wrist, destroying his grip. She finishes him off as he tries to turtle up with his arms with multiple lashes all over his body, butt, legs, and even one on his face before smashing the rod on his left hand, causing him to drop his sword.

The guards, the demihumans and the children look on in awe, while the rest of the escorts can only grimace since they recall the sparring drills they had to go through. The youth sobs quietly as he glares at the Captain, with red marks all over his body and his trouser -especially the backside- in tatters.

\*TA TA TA\*

Armoured troops with shields surround the area as their heavy footsteps fills the air.

\*dakaka dakaka\* \*dou\* \*hihihiin\*

A squad of cavalry follows the troops before the one in front stops his galloping horse, which starts neighing in protest.

“What’s going on here? Who called for the backup?” The figure squints his eyes at the guards with the children, demihumans and finally the two isolated figures on the dirt road. “Brother?”

“Um... There’s just some misunderstanding, Sir Mikhal!” The old captain of the guard stands at attention and salutes before reporting. The rest of the guards wipe their mouths clean and do the same. The children look up at the youth, in shining armour dyed crimson by the setting sun, in admiration.

The blonde youth takes another look around before holding up his right hand, causing one of the cavalry to ride up to him. After some hushed whispers, the troops proceed to march away, leaving Mikhal and his riders alone with the group.

\*ka ka ka ka ka ka\*

Slowly trodding his horse toward the two lone figures, one standing aloof while the other is holding his right wrist, he tries to understand the scene before him. The guards on the other hand, start picking up their short spears while urging the gawking children, still holding onto their eggs, to go home.

“Brother?” Mikhal has to squint his eye to make sure he is seeing things properly, the figure in front of him is bruised and in tatters, but there’s no mistaking that unique girth within the entire kingdom of **Sardon**. He dismounts before making his way before them, leading his horse by its rein.

The tear-covered face of the fat youth shifts his glare from the lady with the fox ears toward the new comer. "Get away from me, you bastard." Nikolas gingerly picks up his sword before limping away.

[T/N: ?? literally translates to wild seed, I'm not familiar with this term nor is it in any dictionaries nor cursory google search, I do know ?? also means wild seed, with the meaning of illegitimate child in chinese, so I assume it's the same thing, hence "you bastard".]

Seeing the incompetent child moving away, the Captain slides the flexible rod back into her belt sheath until the cross-guard fits snugly into the slot next to her waist. She casually slides her sai into place while walking up to the mounted knight.

"What happened here?"

"Well, greetings to you too, Sir Knight." The Captain's eyes narrow once more before replying sarcastically. "Do your kingdom's soldiers have a habit of accusing others of eating children before attacking them?"

The guard from before runs next to the youth, leans down and whispers into his ears. The youth makes a difficult face before the guard finally backs away. The guard gives the demihumans an apologetic bow with a smile before leaving with his squad while clutching some eggs in a woven basket.

"Certainly not, Captain...?"

"Vera."

"Captain Vera, I apologize for the accusation and resulting consequences." The youth makes a sweeping bow with his arms before

standing back straight. Although he's considerably shorter than everyone else, he has an awkward sort of grace.

The Captain relaxes her guard and smiles. "And here I thought all you leading types are useless meatheads."

"Captain, Mikhal." De'muel walks past the riders and greets both of them, while the rest of the demihumans return to the campfire.

\*guuuu\*

\*hahaha\*

"I guess all of us are hungry, care to join us for dinner?"

\* \* \* \* \*

"Wow, a lot happened since you last visited us, congratulations on becoming knighted!"

"Thank you, I will be joining you guys with the Royal Princes and Princess in a short while. I didn't know the Academy got a permit to trade here though... wait... are you guys the ones that supplied our King with the tea a while back?" Mikhal leans in before whispering. "Anything good that I can get off of you guys? Like these eggs here, how come I didn't see this the last time I was at the Academy?"

De'muel looks at Mak'ra, who looks back meaningfully.

"Coming through." The two move out of the way as Mikhal leans back, while Laum sets an egg vertically on a cup before carefully cracking the top open.

“Eh... What are you doing, Laum?” De’muel wants to resume the talk of trade as soon as possible and strike while the iron is hot.

“Shh...” The rat-tailed teenager carefully takes the top part of the egg white off after removing the shell, placing the piece in a bowl nearby. Inside the fist sized egg, the golden yellow yolk peeks through. After sprinkling on some salt, flower petals, and a clear mixture of liquid, he stirs the viscous liquid with the wooden spoon. Kalmi hands him a small piece of bread as if on cue and he scrapes the spoon on it before eating it whole. He chews it thoroughly before giving a nod, puts the spoon into the egg that is still partially in its shell and leaves as quickly as he came. Kalmi gives De’muel, Mak’ra and Mikhal each a quarter loaf of bread before moving onto the next group.

The three of them look at the cook with raised eyebrows before looking at the piece of bread. Shrugging, Mikhal is the first one to scoop a large spoon of the soft-boiled egg onto the bread before taking a bite. A faint fragrance, with a sweet, mellow, rich, savoury flavour fills his mouth. The soft, light texture melts right into the bread, enhancing the bread’s natural flavour without overpowering it.

[T/N: ??? is half-cooked egg, I’m PRETTY sure it is soft-boiled egg, someone correct me if I’m wrong]

\*unnnn\*

Groans of delight can be heard from elsewhere near the campfire where the rest of the cavalry are eating with the demihumans. The youth touches his nose with his first knuckle a few times before giving his lip a quick lick.

“Wow, okay, you guys definitely have to sell me some of these.”

De'muel and Mak'ra quickly try a scoop for themselves, temporarily forgetting themselves.

\*koho\*

The bull-horned youth coughs lightly to regain his composure. "Of course, we have a bunch in stock right now. 20 coppers for an egg, or a barrel of 60 for 11 silvers. The tea is a gold a bag, a bag can make about 600-800 cups. 1/2 a bag for 60 silvers, and 40 silvers for a quarter bag. The zinnia flowers are not that much different from fresh herbs, so about 3 coppers a bundle. Of course, we will provide you with the recipes." De'muel smiles before getting another spoonful of the soft-boiled egg for his rapidly diminishing piece of bread.

A typical serf family can survive on a silver a day, while a decent meal without much mutton at a tavern costs about 30 coppers, 50 coppers if you want to have mutton with it. So after factoring markup and labour costs, De'muel was able to estimate the cost of meat per meal. Him previously visiting all the various shop within the Merchant Quarters also allowed him to further adjust his earlier calculations into the pricing scheme within the city. This leads to him adjusting the costs of the eggs upwards to slightly beneath the cost of mutton.

"Can I get a deal if I buy more?" Mikhal licks his fingers after finishing the egg and bread course, after the bowl of potherbs.

"How much more?"

"Let's see... there's mother, nana, the aunties across, the various guests... hmm... how long can these keep for?"

"The tea can last at least a year, we've never kept any tea longer than that. The eggs can be stored to last for about a month, the zinnia

flowers lasts a dozen days at most.”

“Okay, how about 3 bags of tea, a barrel of eggs and dozen bundles of zinnia?”

De’muel closes his eyes for a moment to do some mental math. “How does 3 gold, 10 silvers and 50 coppers sound?”

Mikhal likewise closes his eye to do the math. “Hmm... some free eggs and flowers, sounds good.”

Kalmi casually sets down 3 mugs of tea on a wooden platter next to the 3 would-be merchants. Without a word, the three gives the tea a blow before taking a sip.

“The apothecaries must be going crazy from this.” Mikhal scrunches his brows before taking another sip of the tea. “This is a little different... Sweet... and fruity?”

“Laum!”

The rat-tailed teenager with the rattail runs over after serving the group that he was with.

“Yes, De’muel-ni?”

“What did you do with the tea? Bring our guest a normal one!”

“Eh? I just added some honey and steeped fruit peels, I’ll change it right away.” Laum starts reaching over for the blonde youth’s mug.

“Huh? What? Nono, this is great! Sorry to bother you. And thanks for the great meal.” Mikhal hold his free hand up and smiles.

The teenager looks at De'muel and Mak'ra with a questioning look before shrugging and heads off.

"Wait... what did you say about apothecaries just now?" Mak'ra turns to the blonde youth as the implication sinks in.

"Yeah, they should be going crazy. You folks brought in something better and cheaper than those bitter herbal tonics, brews, teas and what not." Mikhal makes a disgusted face as he recalls their flavour. "And this tea of yours doesn't need a dispensing ratio and what not. I've seen you guys drink this stuff, so I know there's no side effects too. I am surprised they didn't buy every single bag of yours, I mean, this stuff has gotten pretty famous since His Majesty started drinking it during morning court."

De'muel can only look at Mak'ra listlessly at that comment.

"Oh yeah, before I forget, here's my address." Mikhal starts drawing a rough sketch onto the ground as the two look on. The sounds of chatter and the occasional laughter by the various small groups of people around the campfire fill the early evening air.



# Trial and Tribulation (Last/Down)

“Thanks for hosting us for dinner. We’re going to try and clear up any misunderstanding, my brother shouldn’t bother you again, provided that there isn’t any reason to.”

“Sorry for the coarse meal and for troubling you.”

“Likewise, and if you call that meal coarse, I will have to visit you for a proper meal!” Mikhal mounts the horse that was prepared by his cavalry, a rider hands him a partially hooded lantern hanging from a rod after he’s properly mounted. “See you again soon.”

\*hiin\* \*da ka ka\*

His horse whinnies softly, after he gives it a quick tap with his feet, before walking leisurely on the dirt road. The lantern’s light sways in rhythm with the hoof steps, with the sides of the lantern hooded to avoid agitating the horse with its light.

As soon as the riders are out of sight, De’muel turns to Mak’ra. “Gather everyone and the Captain, she can relay any information to the escorts later.”

\* \* \* \* \*

“Okay, chances are, the apothecaries here are somehow involved with us being unwanted within the Merchant Quarters. Thoughts?” De’muel lets his eyes drift over his younger brothers and sisters inside the crowded sales tent.

“Why don’t we just confront them?” Mak’ra makes a difficult face with a hint of anger showing.

“Because we are in foreign territory. Actually, consider ourselves in hostile territory. As we have seen, some of the people here are out to get us.”

“I agree with that assessment.” The Captain voices her agreement with the bull-horned youth’s reasoning. “I wish we had brought more escorts to be honest. A squad or two shouldn’t be a problem, but we don’t know how many troops they will come with the next time. We can’t always be so lucky and hope to run into that knight every time.”

The people present nod their heads in agreement.

“Umm... I ah... think it’s more than the apof-theraries, maybe aumm... Guild or maybe ah... the... umm... noble is involved.”

Everyone turns around to look at the youngest member of the group who’s timidly trying to get her point across.

“Explain, Carna.”

“Bell-sensei taught us in the ‘Bagged Traveler’ class that... um... if there are diffi-fi-thiculties across the chest, um... no, the board, that usually means someone with power and inf-thluence are behind it.” The lean, muscular girl with white hair, rabbit tail, and ears struggles her way through the explanation.

\*PA\*

“Right! She did say that! And that if we encounter that, get away if we can, since we could be in danger.” One of the youths hammers his fist

into his palm.

“Hmm... We are trading under the protection of the King after all, we just need to be careful not to be caught off-guard and we should be fine.” De’muel crosses his arms. “But you have a point... since we were able to sell to Mikhal with no problem, someone must be doing something behind the scene within the Merchant Quarters.”

“De’muel-ni, why must we trade inside the Merchant Quarters?” Laum’s tail sways in curiosity.

“Because that’s where trade happens?” The bull-horned youth tilts his head and responds without much thought.

“But what about the marketplace?”

“The what?”

“The marketplace, when we were entering the city, there was a marketplace for produce. The Merchant Quarters is the ideal place to sell in large quantity or if you want higher quality. But the marketplace is where the serfs and servants go to for the day to day purchases. At least that’s what that knight was saying during dinner.”

A few of the others nod as well.

“The senseis said they and other immortals shop at the Merchant Quarters.”

“Um... De’muel-ni, we aren’t selling to the immortals, at least not directly.” Mak’ra gives him a quick reminder.

De’muel brings a hand up to his face as he drops his head. After a

moment, he raises his head with a smile. "That's why you are all here, okay, let's try the marketplace tomorrow then. We will go check it out on our way to deliver the purchases."

"What about those other stuff, nii-san?"

"What other stuff, Kalmi?"

"The earthnuts and their roots, they will keep for a while... but I don't recall you trying to sell them to Sir Mikhal earlier. Can we cook with it?"

De'muel looks at Mak'ra, Mak'ra looks back at De'muel. They both realize the other has completely forgotten about them due to their other worries.

"Actually, we need to cook with them." Laum moves his mouth left and right. "Those knights were licking their bowls clean after their second helping, like th-"

"Like they never ate it before, even the potherbs they wanted seconds!"

"Yeah, what Kalmi just said." The rat-tailed teenager nods in agreement with his partner.

"Um... I think what they mean is um... 'samples'." One of the other demihumans offers.

"Good point, I brought them along because I haven't seen them sold here the last time we visited. I'd forgotten all about it to be honest. Okay, you two are free to do what you think is best in order to promote them. Is there anything else?"

Everyone present looks at each other, seeing no further issues, De'muel gives out some instructions. "Okay, finish your tasks and get some rest. Mak'ra, you and a few others will hold the fort. The rest of you, we are going to go make our first delivery tomorrow and check out the marketplace, make sure you are well-rested and prepared. Captain, please send some escorts go with us tomorrow."

The Captain gives a nod before exiting the tent, everyone follows her and exits shortly after. The various tasks get completed one after another in quick succession as they try to make time to get as much rest as possible.

\* \* \* \* \*

Sammy pulls a cart into the marketplace just as the shoddy looking shops are being opened, on the left, right, and further in the rear, are the escorts. The cool, slightly clouded sky shifts from the deep blue of the breaking dawn into a shower of white, golden light, as the sun peaks over the mountains in the north. The few pedestrians on the paved road simply moved to the side before they curiously look at the unusual group of demihumans. Likewise, the shopkeepers give them a curious glance before returning to their work.

De'muel gives a nod to everyone before stopping the cart in an alleyway, letting some of his siblings off. Kalmi and two others let go of the barrels they were holding onto tightly and start getting the various things ready. Captain Vera stands guard at the front of the alleyway while an escort stays in the back, the last escort is on the main road, keeping an eye out for the "sellers".

"Sir, can I interest you in some of these goods?"

...

“Young Miss, what do you think about selling something new and delicious in your stall?”

...

“Mister! Hi! I’m a trader from around Feia, we have various goods for sale that might be just the thing for your stall!”

...

“Good morning, Miss...”

The various teenagers that were part of the “Bagged Traveler” class start putting their training into practice. Rick had previously taught them some tricks of diplomacy he’d picked up from his family, ranging from flattery, reverse psychology, bluffs, and so forth. Bell had spent quite a few days on lessons in regards to theory of sales, the methods of reasoning, and persuasion. Kun on the other hand taught them something more basic, how to exploit the basic instincts of all living things, how to entice someone, in this case, with hunger. These teenagers approach the shopkeepers one by one, with little success.

The smell of something fragrant and earthy fills the air, mixed within it is a separate smell of citrus. One of the teenagers is carrying a mug and a bowl toward one of the shopkeeper he had convinced to try some of the goods. In the bowl is a small portion of potage - made with earthnuts, a little root vegetables and herbs - with a slice of egg, cut length-wise, on top, while in the mug is tea.

The middle-age shopkeeper wearing a bandana over her brownish-blond hair smiles at the teenager with rabbit features, readily accepting the bowl and mug before placing them onto a nearby counter of

her stall. After setting them down, she gives the bowl a quick blow to cool it before drinking it slowly. "This has depth and flavour, needs touch ma salt, but seems nic' and thick, starchy too, so it be pretty filling." She picks up the piece of egg before chewing it slowly, her eyes looks back and forth. "This... shoulda need more salt, right? The size of th's egg is pretty big... But... that subta richness would be over-powered..." \*butsu\* The woman grumbles to herself as though in an argument.

Carna looks on, hesitating to interrupt her. Finally finding her courage, she picks up the mug and silently offers to the grumbling woman who absentmindedly takes it and drinks a sip.

"Ehhhh?!" The woman's body has goosebumps from the unexpected rush of flavour, the sharp citrus scent waking her mind up suddenly. "Is this some sorta new herb'l concoction?!".

The rabbit-tailed girl shakes her head. "No, it's just tea."

"Tea? You mean like those herbal tea for when ye be sick?"

"No, miss. We drink it all the time, it's just leaves and occasionally flowers and honey gets added."

"Alright, hon. Ya've got me interest. I can't believe that it's just leaves though..."

"Umm... follow me miss, my brothfer can explain this to you."

"K." The woman turns to one of the other shopkeeps next to her stall. "Oy! Harold! Look after my shoppe for a wee bit! Going'a check out these kids' stuff. Some of it seems to be interestin'!"

“Ay, Clair, you’ve got it boss!” A younger looking man hollers back before he resumes readying his stall.

The woman’s intention is to merely humour the poor girl, she didn’t expect to actually become interested in the products. The potage was nothing special, it might be worth buying if it’s nice and cheap. The egg is larger and has a richer flavour than the small eggs they’ve got here in the kingdom, it would certainly attract the nobles and high society, it will again depend on the price though for her to buy it. But the tea, it is like nothing Clair had ever drank before. There are the herbal fortifying concoctions, but they tend to taste terrible. There are some herbal salads with a similar, but weaker, citrus flavour; but they don’t have the awakening effect. She knows that there’s nothing like it within a month’s distance of the kingdom, since she’s a retired, respectable peddler that had settled down after getting married. But she couldn’t give up her merchant’s spirit, which is flaring up right now. If this is indeed just leaves, then depending on the price, this might be a hidden goldmine.

Clair dutifully heads to the alleyway following Carna’s lead, who in turn stops to address the fox-eared escort standing in front of the alleyway with her arms crossed.

“She is a shopthkeeper and would like to ask De’muel-ni some questions.”

“Understood.” The Captain nods once before returning her cold gaze toward the main street.

The shopkeep can’t help but raise an eyebrow, she didn’t expect the guard to be demihuman too, aside from the girl. Then again, she was too busy working on her stall to notice the cart full of demihumans that stopped inside the alleyway. The white, round, fluffy ball is tied to



the reins of the cart, no doubt that it's the mount, but she's surprised someone would actually spend the time and effort to train and make equipment for the beast.

"Nii-san, Miss... um..." Only now did Carna realize she never asked the shopkeeper for her name.

"Just call me Clair."

Carna shyly nods toward the shopkeep in thanks before continuing. "Miss Clair has some queshtion for you."

\*da ei ei\*

De'muel gets off the cart, occasionally squeaking with his movement, before giving a reply. "Okay, I'll take it from here. Hello, Miss Clair. What can I help you with?"

The woman watches the white humanoid cotton ball go back onto the main street before turning to the figure before her, her eyes couldn't help but drift up toward the set of bull-horns on the youth's head.

\*koho\*

De'muel coughs politely, snapping the woman back to reality.

[T/N: "Hey lady, eyes down here", blame the ED for tempting me]

"Right, before buy'ng anyting, I would'ike to know whais this "tea" of yas. Ah've traveled quite the bits back in me days. Hadn't seen 'nything quite like it."

"Tea is just... tea? Umm... give me a moment. Laum, mug of hot water

and a pinch of tea leaves in a bowl!”

“On my way!”

\*sha da ei ei\*

After a mix of sounds with utensils bumping, cart squeaking and water splashing, the rat-tailed teenager walks down and hands over the requested material. He gives a quick bow to the shopkeep before going back onto the cart. Clair’s eyes follow the tail until it finally disappears completely.

[ED: WANDERING EYES, DOHOHOHOHOHO]

\*koho\*

De’muel coughs politely again, getting Clair’s attention. “See these here?” The youth holds out the mug of slightly steaming water and tea leaves, letting the shopkeeper inspect them. The woman grabs one of the leaves, giving them a rub before putting it back in the bowl. Turning toward the mug, the woman produces a flat stick of some sort from within her shirt and used it to flick some water out of the mug. She nods at the youth, satisfied.

He then hands them both to the woman. “Just pour the water into the bowl.” The woman does as the youth asks, tilting the mug of water into the wooden bowl of leaves. Slowly, the leaves unfurl as the liquid turns from colourless to a light golden brown. The sharp citrus aroma drifts up to her nose, causing her to smile unconsciously.

“How much be it for this tea of yas?”

“A gold a bag, 60 silvers for half a bag, 40 silvers for a quarter bag. A

bag can make 600-800 mugs.”

The woman narrows her eyes. “This be ya best price?”

“We will be happy to give some of our others products to try, to go along with your purchase.”

Clair’s eyes narrows further before breaking into a smile. “Who is ya master that’s ye apprentice under?”

“Eh... we don’t have a master, we were taught in an Academy near Feia though.”

“Academy eh? Ah, the one them guards been talking about. Okay, I will take a bag. Who else be buying from ye?”

“Thank you for your purchase.” De’muel smiles back as a sale finally happens after so long, Mikhal doesn’t count really as he was already obsessed with the tea. “Ah, we are currently on our way to make a delivery to Mikha... I guess I should get used to calling him Sir Mikhal huh... we will be doing that after we are done here in the market.”

“Sir Mikhal eh, the bastard son of that hedonist pig Donavic, no idea how such a good wee kid come from sucha father.”

De’muel can only twist his smile wryly before redirecting the conversation back to the business at hand. “We will make our delivery here later, is sometime around noon alright? Would you want to pay then or pay now?”

\*gubi\*

The woman quickly drinks the bowl of tea in her hand before handing

both the bowl and mug back to the youth and puts away her stick. "Cha, no problem at tha' time." The woman reaches into something under her long blouse as she loosens a string near her waist with her other hand, producing a single gold coin. She rolls the coin on her fingers before expertly flicking the coin in the air in De'muel's direction, who catches it with both hands. "Good to be doing business with ye." She offers her hand, which the youth shook with a smile on his face.

The woman takes another look at the youth's horn before walking out the alleyway. There are some shopkeepers that are looking intently in her direction, ranging from curiosity, suspicion, envy, all the way to hostility. She is well known within the market, has been since she started working, to pass the time, now being the wife of a city guard.

Her reputation as a peddler was good and it followed her all the way here. But it was a few years before the appearance of the Immortals that she made her name, where she bought an excessive amount of salted mutton. She learned from banter with farmers and poor scholars alike and arrived at the conclusion that meat will become scarce later in the year, thus stocking up on the goods ahead of time. She made a small fortune this way, which her husband boasted about. She took on similar opportunities throughout the years, earning her the respect of many and the ire of her competitors.

Those that looked favourably upon her eventually ended up calling her "Boss", likewise, she treated those that treated her well for her ability with kindness, offering advice and help on numerous occasions; one such occasion is now as she heads to toward the one known as Harold.

She's well aware of the reason for the steep discount on the tea's bulk purchase price, it is to influence the selling price of tea by the resellers. By making it 40 silvers a quarter bag, it means that resellers can sell it at a price at under that to make a profit. Since they already get a steep

discount when they buy it in bulk, it's a win-win for the wholesaler, reseller and the customers. Not to mention, promoting other products instead of giving more discount when asked for. This means that whoever is behind the pricing must be someone with a remarkable level of foresight.

[T/N + ED: For those that don't understand it, the price for one bag of tea is 1 gold, the price for the quarter bag is 40 silvers. Using the quarter bag price, it would be 1 gold, 60 silvers for a whole bag. A regular person would not buy in bulk. Since the reseller gets the bag at 1 gold, they've a 60 silver range to work into their profit as long as they sell at a price where it's less than 40 silver per quarter bag, thus customers will buy it from the reseller instead of the De'muel and company as the reseller would be cheaper to purchase from -ie, buying 1/16 bag at 9 silver would be cheaper for the customer, while the reseller would still make a nice profit. Additionally, due to storage reasons, a regular person isn't going to be purchasing bulk amounts in any case. There's also the problem of consuming it all before it expires or insects/molds gets to it. A merchant holds onto a larger quantity for less time than a consumer.

The quarter bag is the base price, not the whole bag - thus the wholesale bag is a steep discount to incentivize bulk purchase for resellers - no further discount is available, but further bulk purchase gives ancillary goods - tying in all their products.]

\*don don don\*

De'muel is knocking on a worn out door of a modest house made of stone with a small courtyard and garden. Although it is must better than the small wooden houses used by the serf families within the region, it doesn't appear to be a house intended for a noble. "Hello? We have a delivery for Sir Mikhal."

\*ta shi ta ta\*

"Give me a minute!" A distant, chime-like, voice answers from within as sounds of movement leaks out through the door.

\*gacha\* \*kara\*

The sounds of latches being unlocked is soon followed by the door opening. A petite, youthful looking girl - with blonde hair that reaches the middle of her back, clear blue eyes, and full figure - greets the youth. "Sorry, you said you have something for Mikey?"

De'muel tilts his head for a moment, wondering who Mikey is until he realized it's probably Mikhal's nickname.

\*keho\*

The youth clears his throat as he reorients himself. "Yes, hi, I'm De'muel. We are delivering the goods he purchased last night. Would you like us to move them to the pantry?"

"Pantry?"

De'muel scratches his head as he comes to the conclusion Mikhal

probably forgot to mention it to his wife. "Sir Mikhal ordered some food and tea from us, unless you would like us to move it elsewhere?"

The girl tilts her head to the side while putting a finger on her chin, looking upward. "Ah! Is this the tea Mikey said he had while out on that mission?" The girl gives a radiant smile before guiding De'muel to the kitchen that's just further into the house.

The house is plain, but full of warmth and charm. The furniture is well-worn, but is clean and tidy. The old wooden floor looks even more worn-out, but it looks to be well taken care of. There are a few vases with flowers here and there with a fur rug between two large padded chairs before the fireplace in the living room. Inside the kitchen is a metal, wood-fired stove that's being used, with several pots of water being boiled, it looks like she's just getting ready to make brunch when they arrived.

After the girl shows him the way to the kitchen and the cellar, the youth goes back outside to give instructions to his siblings, whom carefully starts to move the barrels into the cellar while bringing a few bags to the kitchen.

"Would you like something to drink? Where are you all from? It's rare to see so many demihumans all together. Ah wait! Are you people from that Academy that saved Mikhal?" The girl cheerfully asks in a talkative manner.

"Yes, but it was our teachers that saved him."

\*gaba\*

The girl suddenly rushes forward and gives the youth a big hug, wrapping around his torso and pinning his arms. "Thank you, thank you,

thank you!”

De'muel's face turns red slightly from embarrassment, but he couldn't break the embrace as the girl is surprisingly strong. His siblings couldn't suppress their smiles as they continue their work.

“Um... You're welcome.” The bull-horned youth finally managed to squeak out a weak reply.

The girl finally lets go. “You people have to stay for brunch! I was making it just now, anyways.”

“No, no. It's alright, we still have more deliveries to make.”

The girl pouts cutely, causing De'muel to want to question himself. “Umm... Actually, someone can stay for brunch. Let me, eh... get him right, I will be right back.” The youth heads back outside as his siblings couldn't resist a chuckle at his awkwardness. De'muel can only roll his eyes at them each time. A moment later, Laum follows behind, holding various utensils and tools.

The girl busies herself talking with his other siblings while she tends to the fire in the stove. Seeing that he's back, she dusts herself off before facing the newcomer. “My, that's certainly a unique hairstyle.”

Laum smiles at the compliment, “it certainly helps when I'm working.”

“This is Laum, he's a fellow student at the Academy. His strongest point is cooking, so I will be having him teach you how to cook some of the goods, since we are giving them away as samples to go with the purchases.”

The rat-tailed teenager with the rattail waves a bit before putting his



tools down on the kitchen table.

“Hi, Laum! Pleased to meet you! Oh, you can just call me Marie by the way, I guess I forgot to introduce myself.” The girl gives off a small laughter before resuming. “I’m Mikey’s mom, here, let me help you with those. Oh, I have these tools too, let me get them out.” The girl goes through her drawers getting the various items to match the ones on the table.

De’muel’s eyes bulged at the revelation, barely recovering in time before the girl turns back toward them. His siblings likewise nearly lost control of the barrels they are moving. Laum looks between his siblings in confusion in the meanwhile.

After completing their tasks, the demihumans bid their farewell, leaving Laum and an escort behind. Marie thanks them all, and hugs each of them in turn, including Sammy which cause a chorus of \*kero\*.

\* \* \* \* \*

\*gakon\* \*gakon\* \*kan\*

“Lorine! Get all the kids inside!”

*Hmm...? What’s that noise?*

\*kua\*

I let out a yawn before licking my lips.

*Eh? EH?*

My mind clears up upon recognizing the scent of blood. There are also

the scent of the clawed rabbit, and there seem to be many of them. I look around the usual room, but there doesn't seem to be anyone here. Usually the brown-haired man or the girl would show up, looking at some skins or doing something else, occasionally getting me some delicious bread to eat.

\*eeeeeee\*

A sharp scream pierces the air. A scream I've heard before, following my nose and ears, I rush outside of the room. A scene of chaos unfolds before my eyes, men with pitchforks, sharp curve thing on stick I haven't seen before, hoes and shovels are fighting with tens, if not hundreds of those clawed prey.

[T/N: If you haven't figured out by now, anything that Gui can kill and eat is considered prey to him.]

\*shi\*

I turn around and jump away just in time to avoid a claw that was coming at me.

\*garuru\*

I growl at the prey that dares to try and attack me in surprise and starts fighting back.

# Avenger

[T/N: A quick reminder. Like with the last chapter featuring Gui, the text is heavily in hiragana. Hiragana used this way implies his language skill is that of the elementary school student. Since we don't have an equivalent of expressing this in English, I opted to simplified the language used (the description of objects are kept as is though).]

I lunge forward and quickly snap my jaws at the clawed rabbit, making it jump back. Expecting that it will jump away, I didn't stop going forward, ramming my head into it before it can land. The prey brings its claws down at me as I thought it would, I stopped advancing the moment I touched it, so I'm out of its reach. With its claws down and about to land, I bite it in the head and start shaking my head wildly until I hear a \*pakin\*. I have fought with these prey before, I know how to kill them quickly.

With the prey killed, I put it down. I'd normally start eating, but this isn't the time. There are too many of these prey and they are hunting something.

Brother taught me that even though I'm weak, there are ways for me to hunt things when I shouldn't be able to. I'm not fast like the sky thieves, I'm not strong like the bears, I'm not tough like the horned deers. And because I am weak, I need to look and listen, to know when to attack and when to run away. I've got stamina, I can climb, I can swim, I have a strong neck, I can think and plan ahead. If something works, use it, I still can't believe I was able to catch a sky prey by hiding in the floating water grass.

Right. Something that works, I just ne-

\*eeeeeeee\*

The sharp scream pierces the air again, I can smell fresh blood. Running by instinct, I dash across the field of golden grass and spot a group of prey surrounding the brown-haired man, a bleeding blonde-haired man and the little girl against a cave made out of wood and straws.

\*garuru\*

I growl at the group of prey to draw their attention, slowly start walking up to them to divert their focus on me, it's the same trick we use to hunt bears and the horned prey. With their attention on me, I scream "GO!". The brown-haired man is the first to react, grabbing the little girl in one of his arms while dragging the other man's arm toward the homes.

The rabbits all turn around at the sudden movement by the man, I take this chance to grab the nearest rabbit by its back and slam it into the ground. A soft \*gokin\* sound comes out of the prey, I throw it to the side as I take a quick leap back, regaining their attention. Seeing that they are safe, I start running away. The rabbits chase me for a while, they are not fast, but they have quick, powerful jumps. Taking advantage of that, I lure them into the field of golden grass. I turn sharply as soon as they leap, increasing my distance away from them. I finally got far enough away that I start running in a straight line.

\*uuuu\*

I hear the sound of groaning as I run by one of the many boxes made of golden grass. I sniff the air, it's the scent of blood, the blood of man. I follow the smell and jump onto one of the boxes. "You okay?"

“Who... wait... Mr. Gui?” A man is hiding in the middle of the many boxes, one of the men that surrounded me after I saved the little girl. He had since said sorry and offered me some bread, there’s no point staying mad, so I had myself some yummy bread.

“What’s wrong with you?”

“I’m hurt, please, save me. Wait.” The man clasps his hands in front of his heart, “I request that you save me somehow.”

A see through box appears before my eyes. “Go away you stupid box.” The box disappears shortly after. I look down at the man, he doesn’t seem to be bleeding bad, but his leg looks odd.

*Where did that box come from? Wait, this isn’t the time to start worrying about that, hmm... what did Hank say... right...*

I leap off the box and start looking around.

“Wait! Where are you going?!”

I spend a few moments scanning the area, I finally see what I wanted after a while. I drag over a pitchfork toward the boxes, sliding it through the gap before leaping on the box again. “Get up you maggots! You think the enemy will wait while you rest on your lily ass?!”

The man looks up at me with a stupid face. “You heard me maggots! The enemy will skewer you and cut your head off to show it off at their gate, now move unless you want to be some decoration!” The man looks at me with an even more stupid looking face, but he grasps onto the pitchfork and drags himself up. Whatever those words means, Hank really knows how to get someone up and moving. “Go!” I urge

the man on as he limps his way forward as I keep a look out.

\*sha sha sha\*

The golden grass shakes in the field not too far from me. Soon after, some of the prey are leaping up over the grass before landing.

“Not good. You, find someplace safe. I will bring them away.”

“Daryl! Hurry! I will go unlock the door!”

A voice from higher up screams down at us. I don't have the time to find out who.

\*taataataa\*

The man quickly drags himself over to one of the homes, soon after, a \*gacha\* followed by a \*kara\* comes from the home.

\*garuru\*

I growl toward the swaying grass, I can smell them getting closer. The swaying in the grass suddenly stops after my growling.

“Daryl, quick! Get in! I thought you died!”.

“Wait, Mr. Gui is out there! He saved me!”

“Go inside, NOW! I can take care of myself!”

“But-”

“GO!”

As if my voice is their signal to attack, a wall of prey leaps from the grass, all heading toward me.

I quickly run toward the nearest home and start climbing up one of its corners. I can hear the \*kara\* followed by a \*gacha\* as I make my way up the home. The rabbits finally catch up to me as I climb, but they can't jump high enough to reach me. Seeing that the man is safe, I make my way across the homes from up high as I jump from home to home.

\* \* \* \* \*

*Why am I even doing this? What am I doing here?*

I'm now half-circled by two dozen prey with my back against a home. I had been previously helping strays from the roof, coming down to harass the rabbits before running around and climbing back up, letting the strays escape into the homes. After doing this for about a dozen times, I spotted something strange. 3 men were protecting a woman and a little boy in a home for horses circled by rabbits. Most of the the horses are dead or dying, there are a few dead prey on the floor. I don't know why, but the next thing I knew, I leapt off the roof and charged right through the horde of rabbits, scattering them for a short time. I caught them off-guard and by surprise, the two-legged ones took the chance to run off into the home from the path I opened. I took a nearby prey and shook it until the familiar \*gakin\* is heard before I threw it at the first rabbit that recovered before running off, baiting the rabbits toward me. A second group appeared around the corner when I tried to get to a home to climb up, ending up like this.

\*garuru\*

---

*Stupid! Stupid! Stupid! Why did I take the risk?*

“There he is!”

“Form a wall! Push them back!”

“““ORA!”””

Several tens of men several row deep roars as they advance from my left, the prey start to leap away as soon as they shouted. I quickly make my way to the men before letting out a \*kee\* as a breath of relief escapes.

“Glad we made it in time, let’s hurry inside the townhall, hopefully they will leave by sunset.” The brown-haired man makes his way to the front, it seems he is the one that led the men here.

“...” I look up at the Sun, it is still high in the sky, it will be a long time before the sun sets. I will have to get back for dinner with brother. “It feels like they are here with a reason. Do they normally attack the town?”

The man scrunches his brows while the men murmur among themselves. It seems this is the first time this has ever happened, there isn’t a story from anyone’s family that got passed down.

“Get water, lots of water.” I make the decision to end this, I don’t want to die.

“Water? Why?”

“They are weak in water. We will kill them all or until they retreat.”

“Where can we get water in such short notice...?” The brown-haired man squints his eyes, while absently looking in the direction of the



rabbits.

I turn around as well to give them a glance. “We don’t have a choice, do you have a pond? A water hole? Anything?” This is odd, they aren’t just running away. I put my nose up in the air to take a good sniff.

“We can’t contaminate our wells.”

“The river is too far away.”

“Hey, what about the brewery?”

“Damn it, my livelihood!”

“None of us will have a livelihood if these Huntsmen stay around, assuming our families will still be alive!”

“... Fine.”

“Do it, whatever you have to do, do it now. Move!”

All the men turn around and look at me in surprise.

“Mr. Gui is right, move! They are coming back with more!”

\*TATATA\*

A short, skinny man is leading the way, running up a dirt road heading away from the many homes before cutting across a field of golden grass to reach a bunch of separate stone homes. The rest of us follow right behind, leaving a cloud of dust behind the men’s heavy footsteps.

“Someone come with me to lift the roof and ceiling!”

A tall bulky man joins the short man as they disappear into the largest of the stone homes, with a yellow grass roof. The rest of the men enter, a few stand near the the door, partially closing the door while moving boxes of golden grass behind the door, making the door hole small.

Some are rushing to close the doors on those holes in the walls. A group of men nervously look around, standing in the middle of the large room. I start looking around, there are large round wooden buckets filled with golden grass and water; there are also wooden round boxes around as well.

“Someone, fill those boxes with water!”

“Boxes?”

“The round ones! Quick!”

\*garuru\*

I run up to one of the doors while growling, the air is thick with the scent of the prey, so thick that I can't count how many there are.

\*guu\*

Some of the men at the door swallow hard and groans at the sight. There are rabbits tens of rows thick, leading all the way to the field that we had cut across.

“You, you, you and you. Just keep swinging your sticks, just don't let them rush in! You, you, you and you, stab the rabbit if they get past hit them toward me.” After ordering the men guarding the door, I turn toward the group that's looking lost. “You people switch with them when they get tired! Everyone else, move the boxes of water near here and help me once you are done. Switch out with the front if you think you need to! Don't fight the rabbits, just throw them into the boxes!”

The men look at me with their stupid expressions again.

“Just follow his order! How many of you has he saved already? Fill those barrels!”

“““ORA!”””

“They are here, move it!”

\*shi\* \*shi\* \*shi\* \*kan\* \*shi\*

I stand to the side of the door while the men in front swing their various sticks vigorously into the small opening, occasionally colliding with the prey's claws. The men with the pitchforks stab with a \*busu\* at the rabbits that got too close to the men at front. The others look on nervously while working quickly to fill those boxes, but I know we can do this. This is no different than when we stumbled onto that group of dogs and had to fight them off at a cave with that group of weaklings.

[T/N: This isn't the Cerebus fight, remember, he refers the trainees as weaklings before.]

\*busu\* \*shi\*

“Shit!” One of the men with a pitchfork misses a stab as the rabbit jumps up and aims for the head of one of the men in front.

“Watch out!” The man next to him swings his pitchfork upward.

\*kan\*

The rabbit blocks with its claws, sending it flying high into the air behind the group.

\*zudon\*

The prey lands heavily on its feet. The men with me stare at it with stupid expressions, I dash and grab the rabbit by the neck before it can recovery and slam it into the ground with a \*batan\*. It doesn't put up much of a resistance as I climb up the side of a just-filled round box of water and drop it inside without a sound.

"You! Close the box and make sure it doesn't come out!"

"Umm... what?"

"CLOSE THE LID!"

"Yes sir!"

The man finally reacts and puts the wooden lid on while holding it down.

\*da\* \*da\* \*da\*

There are soft thuds coming from inside of the box as the men in front slow down in their swings, letting more rabbits through. It's lucky that the men behind them managed to keep them safe so far.

"Ahhhh!" One of the men standing around gets slashed in the face by one of the rabbits that got through.

"Save him!" The short man comes running down with the bulky man from earlier, the bulky man runs to grab a pitchfork on the way and stabs at the bloodstained rabbit while the short man guides the bleeding man up the stairs.

*Damn it, they are even weaker than the weaklings!*

The brown-haired man kicks the distracted rabbit in its head, surprising both the bulky man and the rabbit, sending it flying at one of the

boxes. "Some of you switch with the front!"

I run toward the stunned prey and drops it into the nearest box before moving aside. One of the men finally learned what I wanted them to do and immediately put a lid on that box. I turn around to observe the situation, the brown-haired man is helping out with the men in front with a pitchfork, all the men are different now. On the side, I see several men taking deep breaths. The rest are dealing with the few prey that got through, stabbing and slashing at them.

"Stop wasting your energy fighting them! Just lure it near the barrel and somehow get it inside!" The man that was holding the first round box closed shouts at the rest of the men.

The situation right now is the opposite compared to when we were outside, the men were having a hard time fighting off the rabbits as they were too few facing too many, it's many fighting few now, but they are wasting their strength.

The short man runs down from the stairs with a shovel in hand, swinging it down on a rabbit some men are fighting. The rabbit manages to react, but is hit on the side of the head. With a quick step, he scoops up the rabbit with the shovel and drops it into one of the boxes filled with water with a \*bashan\*. "Listen to him! The entire area is full of Huntsmen waiting to get in! Don't waste your energy, just chuck them into the barrels!" The other man jumps onto the box with a lid.

"We can do this!"

""""ORA!""""

\*chara chara\*

Name	Gui (Error)	Race	Error
Alignment	Error		
Level	Error	Class	Error
Guild	Error		
Class Description	Error		
Strength	Error	Agility	Error
Vitality	Error	Dexterity	Error
Intelligence	Error	Wisdom	Error

Charisma

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Luck

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Points Remaining

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Y???ve c??se the demise of n?merous [Huntsmen Rabbit]  
wi????n a sho?t time ?rame. I????at??n i? now possi?le.

Congratulation, you've been hailed as a hero!

Notification: 47 quests completed (unread), 2 unlocked ability bestowed (unread)

“Stupid boxes! Get out of my way! Go away!” I shout at the see through boxes full of lines that suddenly popped up, getting in the way of my view. It's lucky I wasn't in the middle of fighting.

“What's the matter, Mr. Gui?”

“It's nothing, just bo... eh... panels? Yeah, just panels getting in my way.”

We -the bulky man, the brown-haired man, the short man and me- are now standing on the ledge of the roof, overlooking a pond of golden water. We were able to hold off the prey for a while, but people got injured as time went on. The rounded boxes got full as well, leaving us to fight against the rabbits head on. When we ran out of manpower to hold the door, the short man ordered everyone onto the ledge of the roof. The injured followed the ledge and went around to the other side of the roof as we stand guard on the side without the yellow grass.

“How many did we kill? Douglas?”



“I’ve lost count.”

“I reckon on at least hundred or two, look, they look pretty thinned out from up here.”

“So just a little more?”

“Just a little more.”

The rabbits are afraid to approach us now since we had knocked many into the pond and none had gotten out. A small figure appears in the field, I can barely make it out, but the floating redhead thing above it make it visible. All of the sudden, the rabbits all start retreating from the home we are in and start chasing that figure.

“Is it over now...?”

“I think so...”

\*eeeeee\*

I can hear a quiet scream from the direction of the homes.

I climbed off the building and make my way toward the scream. I go the long way to avoid the rabbits, circling around the field before heading to the homes. The scent of fresh blood is thick within the air, even more so than when the prey first attacked. I silently walk on the quiet street, there are some homes with their doors open and corpses laying at the door hole.

“Damn it, that old hag scared me.”

“Yeah, who would’ve thought she’d charge at us, dealing with that limping man was easier.”

“Where did that brat run off to? Don’t tell me she’s going to try to get help.”

\*ahahahahahahaha\*

There are two voices inside the home; I silently walk up to the door. The scent of the old woman hit me, she's the one that prepared the roll of cloth for me to lay on and sometimes even cleans my fur. That scent is mixed with blood, I look at her unmoving form on the ground. A knife is in her hand as a thick pool of blood forms under her body.

*They killed her? Man don't eat man, why would they kill her? Would they do the same to my brother? Brother?*

I can feel my heart beating behind my eyes, my vision becomes narrow and stretched.

*They would do the same to brother? ... Kill, must kill, MUST KILL*

The world becomes a blur, the colours inside the home become streaks. I think I hear some screams, but I'm not sure. I'm seeing red, everything is red. The heartbeat becomes louder, I can't hear anything except my heartbeat. But I'm tearing at something, something soft and tender. It's red. Everything is red. My head hurts. What am I doing again? The world turns black all of the sudden as I was thinking that.

I slowly open my eyes as I feel something shaking me. The world is dark, I blink a few times and it is still dark.

\*beso\*

"..up. Pwease wake up. Don't leab Charrotte alone. Mr. Gui, pwease."

The little girl is crying while talking and shaking me.

"What... happened? Where are we?"

\*beso\*

“Misper Guia!”

The girl’s crying as she hugs me.

\*kara\*

The world suddenly fills with light as the blackness suddenly opens up like a door.

“Charlotte!”

“WAAHHHH!”

The girl cries in relief after running toward brown-haired man. I blink a few times before walking out of the hole to start looking around. The girl must have come out of her hiding place to drag me inside the hole, how...? Why...? I see the two men that were talking, laying on the ground, as my vision becomes clear. One has a knife buried in its left eye, with numerous cuts all over the body. The other is completely bruised, with various kitchen-ware laying on the floor next to it. Both of them had their throat ripped out.

\*eeeeeeeeee\*

# Legends Untold, Legends Unknown

[T/N: The title is a slight play on word, "legend" was in katakana instead of written as ???. Bravo if any of you figure out the implication :3]

“Whew... is everyone alright?” The brown-haired man asks everyone on the roof in relief.

\*uuuuu\*

Groans of acknowledgment come as a response.

“Hurts like hell... but we really did it, didn’t we?”

“Sure did, can’t believe we took them on and survived...”

“uuuh... my ale and beer...”

\*pa\*

The giant of a man gives a pat on the brewery owner’s shoulder. “Don’t worry, Langley. We will all pitch in and help.”

“That’s a given, we wouldn’t have survived if we didn’t have all these barrels of beer and ale with which to drown the Huntsmen.” The brown-haired man shakes his head slowly in disbelief. “To think Mr. Gui had this method to deal with them. I think we are going to need to build a pond in case this happens again.”

\*fuuu\*

“It’s going to be a pain getting rid of these Huntsmen, hope the barrels aren’t damaged. Guess the entire beer pool will have to be gone too.” Langley sighs while slumping his shoulders, making his already small stature look even smaller.

“You know... you might be able to pickle them... or smoke them in your malt house. I remember some nomadic tribes in the extreme edge of the Frozen West like to drown their prey in alcohol before smoking them to preserve the meat to make them taste better. There’s also the seafarers tribe that would put live shellfish into diluted alcohol before cooking them.”

[T/N: Pickling meat in strong alcohol has a long tradition in various cultures. Personally didn’t think about it until our ED mentioned it. Russians immerse their meat in vodka for the winter as it’s both an antifreeze and well, booze. Asian and South American cultures throw in scorpions, snakes, hook worm and various other animals in their locally produced alcohol to serve as fortifying drinks. In some cases, as a full marinate (dark meat marinated with wine and spices are to die for, regardless of culture). Although in all these cases, the alcohol is unusually strong, smoking the meat soaking it in weak alcohol should theoretically be enough to preserve the meat. As a side note, I’m drooling just imagining the flavour, I’d think it would be something like biltong with a more complex and richer flavour.]

The short man’s eyes show a sharp glint. “Are you for real, Cori?” Langley had heard tales about the brown-haired man after he showed up suddenly one day, about five years ago, saying that he’s a traveler here to repay a debt. No villagers knew of him, nor were there any villagers that travel around aside from going to the Free City of Feia to the south and the border town of the Norman Kingdom, Liliheim, to the north. Naturally, everyone was suspicious of him. But he was neither stingy nor generous and has been paying for boarding in a

guesthouse ever since his arrival. The children love him since he always tells vivid tales when asked. The adults always thought he was merely a failed scholar or scribe since the tales sound outlandish. But when the first of many strangers started to show up to beg him to return somewhere, the villagers became suspicious again. Through his own connections in the cities, Langley tried to look into Cori's background and that of the stranger's. Cori himself is a mystery, but the stranger was supposedly a renowned merchant within the Florence Conglomerate. The subsequent strangers were all equally powerful, some of which have enough wealth and influence to overthrow a minor kingdom. For these merchants to come begging, this means Cori can't be a simple man.

For such a man to stay here for so long to repay an unknown debt, Langley wanted to know more. After gradually getting to know him, he found Cori to be extremely knowledgeable. The idea of building a communal malt house for the local wheat came from him, vastly improving the livelihood of the entire village - as he claimed it would. From the malt, the brewery expanded into beer brewing, making a lower quality beverage compared to ale, but at a much reduced cost. The villagers' baked goods got sold within the morning in the two cities, said to be well liked by some of the better-off citizens and the nobles. The children became slightly healthier as well, with fewer becoming sick while many have developed robust constitutions. Everything happened as he said it would - and then some. Just how many of those tales that Cori told to the children were real? How many were actually tales of fancy? The previously unheard of bread loaves made with malt are now so good, that even the resident immortal seems to enjoy them. Now that this same man is hinting that there's a way to recover his loss, Langley's heart leaps in joy.

[T/N 1: Malt is made by soaking cereal grains in water, germinate them to a certain extent before stopping further germination by drying

them. Since smoking was mentioned, I think he's referring to the process of floor malting where the perforated wooden floor -ie wooden floor board with holes- gets heated and smoked via a series of channel underneath the floor, heated via a central fireplace. This process is well documented in the making of whiskey where peat smoke is used prepare the malt.]

[T/N 2: Baked bread weren't usually sold out within a day in medieval times, that's why there's all the saying complaining about hard bread. So the villagers completely selling out their bread within the morning is actually a pretty big deal since you don't have to stay long in the city and earn more than your usual profit. It should be noted that bakers usually get their leftover, unsold goods, in this case, the bakers can buy what they want to eat, indirectly improving their family's health due to better nutrition. This doesn't include the specifically made hard breads which were intended for long term storage]

"Well, if you don't believe me, you can always ask Mr. Gui to try the taste for you, right Mr. Gui?" Cori turns around expecting a reply, but sees no one there. "Mr. Gui?" The brown-haired man looks around again, the rest of the men start looking around in confusion as well.

"He's over there." The large man points to the side, where a short, long figure is running on the ground. Cori's brows furrow at the sight.

"Hugh, Langley, look after the injured and keep the door closed for the time being just in case."

The other two uninjured men nod as Cori makes his way past the attic beer fermentation pool, down the stairs, past the barrels filled with drowned [Huntsmen Rabbit]s and out the door.

[T/N: Oh boy, Attic beer fermentation, both me and the editor didn't know much about it, we only know "of" it. After some research, it's referring to the practice of brewers opening their roof at night to let insects and other windborne material -likely fungi and yeast- to germinate within the pool, fermenting it. This GREATLY reduces the labour required as opposed to ale, but quality is harder to control.]

\* \* \* \* \*

A sorry sight meets Cori's eyes as he makes his way through town. There are dead villagers everywhere, many lying slumped on the floor in the doorways. Cori readies his weapon, advancing slowly through the village. All the houses within his sight seems to be ransacked, with the obvious valuables taken. He checks each body to make sure that they are indeed dead, all of them seem to have died from being stabbed in the heart. His heart sinks as he sees the opened door to a particular house, it's a home to a particular child and the 3 generations of her family. He walks in and notices a strange sight, aside from the dead grandmother, there are two more corpses. Corpses of strangers.

\*gata gata\*

There's a soft rattling sound while he was inspecting the corpses of the strangers, causing him to jump straight up.

\*gata gata\*

The rattling continues again, Cori is ready for it this time. Seeing that it's from a storage closet, he readies his weapon and opens it quickly. The sight of Charlotte holding an unconscious Gui surprises him.

"Waaaahh!"



The girl that suddenly starts crying and running toward him causes him to kneel down and hold her in his arms to comfort her. The gray fox slowly gets up in a daze, looking around a bit before staring at the corpses intently.

\*eeeeee\*

A scream pierces the air and Gui's ears twitch in a certain direction before he dashes out the door. Cori can only look down at Charlotte before worriedly looking back up at the door where Gui left from just a moment ago. Making a snap decision, he picks the girl up, partially closing the door before hiding in the bedroom. By keeping the door open, he hopes whoever is responsible won't come back since an open door seems to indicate that a house has already been ransacked. Gui, after all, is an Immortal, so Cori put Charlotte's safety as the higher priority.

\* \* \* \* \*

The gray fox climbs up onto a house before leaping from one house to the next, approaching the location of the scream silently. He might be spotted, being out in the open, but at least there would be some distance for him to use to run away. On the relatively straight dirt road, there's simply no cover, especially if the killers responsible are faster than him.

\*KAN\* \*kan\* \*KAN\*

The sounds of metal striking metal reverberates in the air. Gui makes his way quickly over to the source of the sound, in front of the largest building in the village, the Administrative Building. It's the equivalent of a town hall and a storage facility combined; since it is only a village, obviously it would be smaller than an actual town hall. Naturally, it

would be the first place for people to gather should disaster strike, aside from staying in their home. It's guarded by the only guards within the entire village, 6 retired guards from Feia.

"Just die already you old men!"

"As if!"

"They are already dead, they just don't know it yet!"

"You heartless monsters!"

"Stubborn old goats, you want to talk about heartless? You guys didn't budge an inch when we trained that horde of [Huntsmen Rabbit]s here! Ahahahahahaha"

[T/N: Training is the act of aggro-ing/drawing the attention of monsters and running them into someone else. In this case, the entire village.]

\*uu\*

3 users, with the glowing red demonheads -the mark of a [Villain]-, taunt the two remaining guards who can only reply in anger as they struggle to ward the users off. The other guards are dead or severely wounded, with a crowd of villagers huddled inside the building.

"«Veil of Darkness»"

"«Serpent Strike»!"

"«Heartseeker»!"

The user in the back casts a screen of black in front of the other two users as they rush forward with their «Skill»s. The one on the left

dives low to the ground while the one on the right charges straight forward. The guards tucks their shields close to their chests as they lower their spears, they have seen how their fellow guards were attacked and ready themselves. The veils moved back and forth in front of the users, as though they were curtains, with no fixed distance between them and the users.

Gui had already reached the ground and gotten within striking distance of the magic user in the mean time.

\*KIIIII\*

A loud, high pitched whining, whimpering noise fills the air just before the other two users reach the guard with their attack. They turn back at the unexpected, sorrowful sound behind them. Unexpectedly, the veils lose their effect, revealing the two users' locations to the guards. They were surprised that the users are attacking from the sides, contrary to the location of the curtains, but manage to stab their respective opponents in the chest at the last second.

\*mmnnnnnnnn\*

The third user is holding his crotch with both hands as he rolls on the ground, whimpering in pain. Gui spits out the piece of cloth in his mouth before quickly finishing him off by biting his throat before giving it a good shake. Without a moment's delay, he dashes toward the user on the right that had turned back to deal with the guard.

"Germane! Watch out!"

\*GAAAA\*

The user on the right screams in pain as the gray fox bites hard on the

section between the calf and ankle as the other user warns him in vain. Taking that moment of distraction, the guard in front of him suddenly bashes him in the head with the shield before dropping it and ending it by stepping in with a powerful two-handed upward thrust with the spear. The spear enters the user's throat with a \*zaku\* before settling within his brain. The user can only stare blankly at the guard as his whole body slowly slides down the spear from his now unsupported body weight, before it's unceremoniously thrown to the ground.

\*BASHI\*

The other guard slams his shield into the chest of the remaining user who had just tried to warn his comrade, before spearing him in the right eye with a wet sounding \*zaku\*, killing him instantly.

\*ha\* \*ha\* \*ha\*

The guards breathe heavily as they recover from the fight.

"Thank you, Lord Gui. You saved all our lives."

"Mayor, take care of the wounded quickly, they might be saved yet!"

"We don't know how to repay you, Lord Gui."

"Thank you, thank you, thank you."

"It isn't over yet, keep everyone safe. As for repaying me, just give me bread, maybe with meat this time." Gui holds his nose up in the air as he takes a sniff. His ear twitching left and right, within a few moments, he's gone. The guards and villagers can only do as they are told and fortify their position.

As the sun slowly approaches the horizon, Gui managed to find two other users with the [Villain]'s mark and dealt with them promptly. That night, he gets to feast on bread and rabbit within the village

before logging out and eating dinner with Kun. While the food within Second Phantasia was certainly delicious for Gui, he still prefers to eat with Kun and Hank. There are a few new members eating with them now, but Gui considers them skill-less juniors for the time being.

\* \* \* \* \*

The next few days, the village spends its time holding funerals and rites for the deceased and their families. Langley, who managed to convince the men to help him skin the drowned rabbits while waiting within the brewery, has successfully cured the meat en masse. After finding out what has happened to the rest of the village, he secretly vowed to share all the profits he gets with the village as interest free loans. Stupidly enough, the [Villain] marked users tried to return to village to get their gear back. Except for the two users who Gui killed on his own, the rest were naked save for their avatar's basic undergarments. Gui was surprised that he smelled their scent again, but swiftly dealt with them nonetheless. After they tried to sneak in for the third time after dying twice, Gui started patrolling around the village, checking for their scent. After finding their unmoving bodies a few times and killing them, the users finally decided to stay away from the village altogether, accepting their loss. As for the crystals, Gui ate them since they look like ice chunks and he wanted something hard to chew on after all the various soft bread the villagers had offered to him.

After a week or so...

"Mr. Gui, how about you escort me and a few villagers to Feia?" Cori asks him as soon as Gui logs in.

"Why?"

"There are a few orphans as a result of the last attack, I want to at least

bring them to their family, if they don't have any, at least an orphanage. Also, I'm going to see if I can barter for some supplies and also get some people to help the village."

"Orphans?"

"Hmm... something like children without family."

"Oh..." Gui vaguely recalls the time when his mother died trying to save him and Kun against the bear.

\*Wafuuun\*

Gui gives a mournful soft whine before nodding his head.

\* \* \* \* \*

\*ka ka\*

"Eh... what's going on here?" Cori already noticed something was going on within Feia from a distance, but he didn't expect such festivities when he arrived with his carriages. The streets are lined with red and blue flowers and ribbons, with similar decorations on the balconies of all the various shops. Even the sulking and sad children stare in wide-eyed wonder.

"Hail, Archson!" Cori waves at a town guard he knows.

"Hail, Cori! What brings you here?"

"Well, you see..." Cori proceeds to describe the events that took place at the village. Archson can only nod sympathetically with a tight face. "Anyhow, what's up with all the festivities here?"

“Oh... ummm...” The guard makes a shit-eating grin.

Cori stares at the man's body language and face. “You earned a fortune? No... found a treasure?”

The guard starts shifting his eyes while still somewhat maintaining his smile.

“Wait... you have a son?” Cori stares even harder. “No, a daughter! Wow, congratulations! Didn't you say you were impotent?”

The man scratches his head sheepishly while maintaining his smile. “Yeah, so did the physicians. Let's just say a miracle bumped into me.” The man tries to straighten his expression, but his smile is too wide and the overflowing joy prevents him from doing so. “The festivity, well, we are celebrating the healthy birth of all the Elders' children.”

“Wait... what?”

“All the Elders' children were born safely.”

“What do you mean, all? Who?”

“Umm... every single one of them.”

“You are kidding me...” Cori stares in disbelief. “Wait... you aren't kidding me... what in the four heavens...” He has seen and heard many strange things, but this is a first even for him.

“In any case, hit up the restaurants, all the different Elders are sparing no expense in the celebration and are serving free food. There are games and prizes for everyone as well if you hit up the townsquare.”

The guard lowers his voice to a hushed whisper. "I'd personally visit old Markus' shop, you should have seen him when he found out his wife is with his child. We couldn't see his eyes for days. They are serving seafood pies and meat and cheese dumplings in his shop."

[T/N: Not sure if "couldn't see his eyes for days" is the equivalent idiom. Pretty much, it implies he's so happy that he is grinning like an idiot all day, so much that no one can see his eyes.]

"I guess I can use this to try and cheer the kids up before returning them to their relatives... By the way, are the Chambers opened with this going on?"

"Oh, if you are looking for the Elders, they are all heading to Zinnia Academy to pay their respect. You could probably catch up to them, it isn't too far a travel, but the group is going pretty slow with all the missus and newborns."

"Where is this Zinnia Academy... more importantly, who runs it?" Cori's mind is going into overdrive. First, Archson -who is supposed to be impotent-, was able to impregnate his wife. Then, all the Elders within Feia happen to have children at around the same time. Now, all of them are going to pay their respect to an Academy? It doesn't take a genius to figure out what it implies.

"Ah, that'd be my daughter's godfather, Headmaster Rick. He also happens to be an Immortal. Runs the Academy with a few other Immortals. The 'Little Witch', the 'Cat Amazon' and the eh... what did the captain call him... think it was... the 'Prince of Destruction'? Oh, and the Academy is filled with only demihumans, they are recruiting students though."



[T/N: The Academy is recruiting as opposed to accepting, this is due to the fact that the Academy was never “opened” nor was it officially an Academy until Rick got tricked into running it. Going by the previous volumes, you can see Rick tried to get students from the elders as no one knew of the Academy.]

“Headmaster Rick? ‘Cat Amazon’? ‘Prince of Destruction’? Never heard of them... but ‘Little Witch’...? Can’t be the same one, can it...?” Cori’s eyes are starting to spin as one bombshell arrives one after another. Each of those titles are amazing in their own rights, since he knows for every tall tale, there’s a grain of truth. In this case, it’s the famed captain that called someone the ‘Prince of Destruction’. Cori gives himself a good shake of his head. “Ah, I should get going, but wait here, give me a moment.”

The brown-haired man goes into the carriage, only to see Gui licking his drooling lips and his tail sweeps back and forth vigorously as though it’s a living duster. He quickly grabs a parcel he prepared beforehand before returning to the front of the carriage.

“Here, share this with your fellow guards.” Cori casually tosses the parcel into the guard’s hands.

“Ohhhh, what is it?” Archson catches it easily without dropping his spear with a \*kisha\*.

“Some new cured meat, ale marinated dried rabbit jerky and beer marinated smoked rabbit meat. Tell me what everyone thinks, I will leave a stock at Carvin’s as usual, anyone that wants them can buy them there.”

[ED: Carvin = carving, as in meat butchering. this is a terrible, terrible dad joke. You’re welcome for the facepalm.]

[T/N: Now that I think about it, that's a surprising accurate use of the name within context... still... that pun...]

“Thanks! Will do! And tell the villagers that the guards send their condolences.”

Cori nods with a sad smile before whipping the rein slightly, causing the the horses to go forward. The carriages behind him follow him as he heads to the townsquare.

\* \* \* \* \*

Most of the children had their fill of fun and amusement at the town-square. After hitting up a few shops for the free food -where Gui struggled to eat some of the food due to them being served in soup or stock-, Cori finally brings the children to their relatives one by one. The practice of adopting one's dead sibling's offspring is widespread on the Zrewheig continent, there are occasions where these children will end up getting sold to slavers. Fortunately for them, this particular region of the continent practices serfdom and slavery is abolished by law in all the nearby kingdoms and city states. Instead, the unwanted children would become properties of the state where they are placed in an orphanage where they are trained in basic skills. The cost of running the orphanage is recouped from the orphans when they grow older and start working. In short, they become indentured to the state. It isn't a perfect system, but at the very least, it is a better fate than being a slave.

The remaining children are somehow related to the Elders' families or are without families all together. As such, Cori makes his way over to the Academy, after getting directions and taking a short rest.

\* \* \* \* \*

“ ... ”

“ ... ”

“ ... ”

Two figures get up from the table that's just outside the main building of the academy.

“What the hell is going on?”

“What did you do while I was busy, Rick-ni~?”

“I didn't do anything! I swear!”

“Then why is there so many guests coming... and why are the dog-eared soldiers escorting them in that manner~? Did you get married to some princess while I was away? Or you couldn't help yourself and had a tryst~?”

“What?! I never left the Academy! Ask Isnici! Or that uncle from the archery range!” Rick pulls on his hair with both his hands, as though asking, “why me?” with his gesture. “What the hell are those Wan-Wan doing?”

Till narrows her eyes, which causes Rick to lift one leg to the side in air and draws his arms in to dodge on reflex. “Wan-Wan~? How cute~~ I'm going to be borrowing that~”

[T/N: Old comedy posture, seen in HK films, asian family sit-coms and japanese varieties shows from way back whe. Used to be the

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common “getting ready to be hit” pose. Here’s a [visual aid](#), courtesy of Solistia.]

Rick looks at himself and his posture. Before coughing with a light \*koho\* to regain his composure.

[T/N: And dignity >.> Get it together Rick!]

“Well, whatever it is Rick-ni, deal with it~. Since you are the Head-master and all~”

Rick looks on at the hundred odd guests that are slowly making their way onto the field just outside the main building, his face twitching non-stop in the mean time.

# An Unexpected Show (Up)

In Earth time, it has been almost four months since Rick's first stumbled into the guard. That means within the world of Amoaatlz, a year has almost passed. It is once more the Summer season, during the 3rd day of the High month. The [Field of Ashes] is a blazing hell once more while the kingdom of **Sardon** is enjoying its warm weather. The summer harvest is in full swing in parts of the region, while other villages are rotating their crops to match the season. In this warm, comfortable weather, the entire upper echelon of the city of **Feia** presents itself at the **Zinnia Academy**, surrounded by an escort force consisting of demihumans as well as its original retinue of town guards. As the carriages and carts stop in the large field before the main building of the Academy, the passengers start disembarking from the various vehicles. In the mean time, some of the demihuman escorts disappeared briefly, before coming back in colourful uniforms and with glistening swords strapped to their belts.

[T/N: ?? - ????, Summer Grow/Become/Ripe - High Month Third Day, doesn't make sense in English at all even though it does make sense in kanji. Each of the seasons and months have their own unique little meaning as well. In this case, it means the peak month of summer.]

“Halt!” A rough looking caninoid -with half of his right ear missing-leading the way abruptly stops the group. “Welcoming the Elders of Feia! Present, ARMS!”

The colourfully dressed squads behind him quickly form two columns, before marching toward opposing sides, becoming a living corridor. Each of the 64 caninoids stands rigidly at attention in perfect unison.

As though on a silent cue, all of them soundlessly draw their swords with their left hands, holding the swords high above their heads.

““HA!”” \*SHI\*

““HA!”” \*SHI\*

““HA!”” \*SHI\*

...

Starting from the pair closest to the visiting entourage, each pair shouts before slashing their swords downward, bringing the sword to their left side, within an inch of their neighbour. Echo guides an elderly, wrinkly, smiling man toward the path created by the caninoids in special uniforms. The captain of the Feian guards stands on the opposite side, fitting in perfectly. Behind them are 9 other Elders, each of them looking left and right. Further behind, the rest of the entourage are looking left and right as well, in obvious awe of the escorts, as they murmur amongst themselves.

“Headmaster Rick, this way please.” A demihuman appears from nowhere, surprising both Rick and Till who were simply watching the unexpected ceremony. Rick nearly jumps a foot in the air from a standing position, he starts rubbing his knees from the unexpected jolt after he confirms where the voice came from.

“Damn it! Don’t do that!” Rick flexes his legs one by one after rubbing the knees. “What is going on anyways?”

The demihuman tilts his head. “These are the rulers from the city of Feia, bearing gifts and such. The students here informed us that the Academy have friendly relations with them. As such, we are treating it as an impromptu State Visit. We apologize if we are inadequate in our presentation.”

“Wait, what, who told you to do that?!” Rick starts scratching the back of his head rapidly with an incredulous face.

“Just go along with it Rick-ni, this looks cool~!” Till’s eyes are shining. Although she is said to be a prodigy and knows many things, she is still a child at heart. Since she was often isolated or ill, she never had a chance to see a parade in her life. With such an unique sight appearing before her, even though it’s technically small, how can she not enjoy herself?

“Gaaahh! Fine! Lead the way!” Rick gives up in frustration before turning to the demihuman, who can only chuckle good-naturedly.

Till is led elsewhere by another demihuman who shows up afterward, she unwillingly follows as she keep her eyes on the colourful troops that move in sync, with beautiful, elaborate movements as the leading Elder walks past them.

...

Rick is brought to the end of the caninoid path under the guidance of the demihuman. The first Elder slowly makes his way towards Rick, if one were to look carefully, they would see tears gathering at the corners of his eyes. Next to him is the captain of the guard, wearing a stern, but pleasant, expression. Around the last quarter of the way, Sekn appears out of nowhere and waits a few steps behind Rick and slightly to the right side. Likewise, on the left side, stands Till, who is beaming as she slowly rotates her left arm back and forth while staring at the elaborate, delicate-looking glove and vambrace on it.

The glove is fingerless and only covers the back of her hand, there’s a finely carved ring for each of the four fingers -which is connected to the deep blue fabric on the back of her hand by a fine mesh of

extremely thin, almost translucent wires- which anchor the cool fabric in place. Starting at her wrist, the vambrace -made with fine silvery wires and sapphires that depicts a scene of the sea- anchors the other end of the fabric with a series of woven chains. In the center of the fabric, a series of clear aquamarine gems forms a perfect circle on the back of her hand, making an illusion of a full moon viewed from under the sea. The vambrace is latched together on the inside arm, with a series of runes running along the edge up and down the length of it to amplify mana conversion rates, especially those of Water mana.

This is a replica of a tool Sekn received from Alfina when he first became an Officer. Like the original, it is made to restrict the mana usage of the individual wearing it while constricting the flow of mana as it runs through the entirety of the accessory combo, forcing the individual to learn to control their mana output and exert detailed manipulation. It also allows the gems to endow the coursing mana with additional Water mana stored in the gems if desired. The rings themselves were originally made by Alfina and Sekn's father for practice:

[ED: Here's a [visual aid](#), just imagine a piece of fabric covering the back of the hand]

The Ring of the Peacock, a series of glass prisms embedded on the outer rim of the ring, used for releasing the mana in a cone-shaped manner, like the tail of its namesake.

The Ring of the Crystal Mirror, a series of zircons set on the ring redirects the flow of mana to a fine point, used for concentrating the mana into a single point before releasing it.

The Ring of the Dancing Fae, a plain looking silver ring with hidden runes engraved on the inside, adds random, chaotic movements to the outgoing mana, spreading it in a wide area in an unpredictable



manner.

The Ring of the Desolate Fortress, limits the expelled mana to a fixed distance and shape, effectively making a shield consisting of the mana used.

These rings imitate what any experienced [Magician] can do on their own, although wearing them will still help the individual refine their techniques somewhat. Meaning these rings, individually, are not all that valuable save for their sentimental values. But together, combined with the vambrace's unique properties, make it an invaluable tool to any [Magician], especially beginners. Once they mastered the usage of the tool, they will be able to shape their mana and control the directions of their spells at will. An «Earth Pillar» can become a massive single spike that homes in on its target - or just as easily become a pit of spikes that attacks wildly as if it's alive. A «Fireball» can become so small that it's almost undetectable and can burn a hole through its target without the target realizing it until it's too late - or just as easily become a suit of blazing armour that burns those around the caster. The invention of this tool is one of the minor achievements by Alfina as an [Arcanist] back in the **Pent Kingdom**.

This was secretly made with the help of the regiment's blacksmith as well as Dosnak, who knows Till's exact measurements and mimicked them to help with the minute adjustments. Although it does not come close to replacing the amulet, Sekn still wishes to give Till something to remember Alfina by - a tool borne out of Alfina's legacy and creations seems thusly fitting. Of course, Sekn didn't tell Till about the rings made by his father, merely telling her that this is something Alfina poured her blood and sweat into, which is the undeniable truth.

“Presenting, First Elder of the Free City of Feia, Bartholomew Markus!” Echo announces with fanfare as the sound of trumpets

playing appears from somewhere. The old man walks up to Rick reverently, grabbing his hands and shaking them vigorously. Unexpectedly, the Elder kneels on the ground and starts kissing Rick's feet.

"Wait! What are you doing! Get up, get up!" Rick backs away at the sudden unexpected gesture.

"You are undoubtedly a living god, paying respect this way is a given." The old man remains kneeling on the ground, with his head bowed.

"I'm no g-"

"Elder, Headmaster Rick would prefer a more subtle, discreet way of greetings."

The Elder remembers the promise forced upon them when the God of Fertility agreed to help them in the first place, that it must be kept a secret. He makes a horrified face, "I'm so sorry, Your Wor-... Headmaster. Forgive my indiscretion." The old man struggles to get up before approaching Rick once more, grabbing one of his hands, and bows at the waist until his forehead touches the hand. Markus stands up after a few moments, murmuring apologies repeatedly. Rick can only smile awkwardly.

The ceremony proceeds smoothly, with each Elder repeating the motion of lowering their forehead to Rick's hand after clasping it. These Elders are introduced one after another, before being directed to their pre-determined spot. Most of the entourage look on with smiles or reverence, while a handful shows a dark, sullen expression. By the time the impromptu ceremony ended, it's approaching sunset. Two more groups of people shows up unexpectedly as soon as the ceremony ends, causing Rick's eyes to spin in circles.

The first group consists of 14 men and women on gray Cadejos mounts, led by Niji. The second group is made up of 3 carriages, with a few children, men, and a gray fox. Both parties get escorted by a group of guards, keeping a keen eye on them, but the gray fox draws glances from everyone. The first group has business with Rick, and the presence of the cadejos cause the demihuman escorts to exchange meaningful glances with each other. The second group has important business with the Elders, so they are being led to them.

“Eh, Rick, Till, what’s going on here? It’s like you have an army here or something.” Niji greets the two casually as he comes in range with his people, causing the Elders to furrow their brows in displeasure. Some members within his party waves and smile as well, as they still remember the two during the first time the [Cerebus] was defeated.

“Sir, you and your party must dismount. We will bring them to the stable for the time being.” A demihuman aide appears from the side, interrupting them. Niji gives his two parties of seven a quick nod, before getting off his mount as well. More demihumans show up to help lead the cadejos to the stable.

“Um... what are YOU doing here?” Rick asks back as he can’t think up an excuse in time. “Damn, why are there all these visitors, did blue birds circled the house when I wasn’t looking?” The youth starts mumbling after asking Niji the question.

[T/N: I’ve no idea what ?? represent to, but according to Chinese folklores, they represent messengers. Bird visiting a house often represent death, but that doesn’t seem to be the case here. The other folklore I found saying that birds circling a house means visitors are coming, which I think is the likely interpretation of this line. On the other hand, ??? (red colour bird) circling a house means there’s going to be a fire... I will amend this if someone corrects me with sauce (or until the

bugger gets back to me)

Had someone with some insight via irc

a blue bird is a good omen  
 so maybe the people saw the blue bird circling the house  
 and decided to go there  
 because blue birds are meant to bring happiness  
 or rather, are a sign of happiness  
 it seems to me only your main char is depressed or something  
 or maybe your guests want something to hold ointo  
 and that blue bird could raise their morale  
 hence why they came to the place that's being circled by it]

"I sent you a PM earlier, said I'd drop by for a duel since we will be heading for the Tralan Duchy for a quest to deal with some PKers. Want to do a little testing, if you don't mind. Although... you never did send a reply, did you?" Niji makes a "oops" face while he scratches his cheek.

"Oh? Immortals dueling? Excellent! Hey! Everyone, the Immortals are going to have a duel!" One of the younger Elders starts riling up everyone.

"What?! Immortal duel?!"

"Did you hear that? A duel!"

The news spreads like a rapidly falling line of dominoes, making its way all the way to the people in back, before Rick can even make a reply.

"I don't th- OOMMPH" \*uuuu\* "What was that for, Till?" The blond youth rubs his ribs that got suddenly visited by the elbow of a certain

little girl.

Till reaches up and drags Rick's left ear to her mouth before she starts talking in a hushed tone. "The duel is a good way to show off, we can get more students this way if we do it right~"

"But Bell and Kun aren't here."

"Don't worry~~ Just follow my lead." Till releases Rick and turns to Niji. "Sorry~ there's only 2 of us logged in at the moment. Mind if I make some suggestions?"

"Eh, I don't mind, we are just here to see how far we've come. As you can see, we have beaten the [Cerebus] 13 more times." Niji brags lightly with a beaming smile.

Rick and Till look at each, before turning to look at Sekn... who is now no where to be seen. They can only make an awkward smile before turning back, since Niji and his party have no idea the deal Sekn had them implement during their first meeting.

The background is in organized chaos as people vie for a better viewing position for watching the duel. The demihumans likewise start preparing the grounds and lighting up some braziers, they familiarized themselves with all the equipment ever since the "training games" were introduced by Rick. It didn't take long before chairs and tables were prepared for the Elders while the rest of the people are forced to sit on the floor in the front and on logs in the back. However, no one is complaining, the duel between the Headmaster of the Academy and the Captain of the Guards became well known within **Feia**. In fact, quite a few of those watching now watched the duel within the barracks. There is even a betting pool going on with those in the back and amongst the human guards.

“Okay~ Lets do something a little different, let’s have a 14 vs 14 fight with non-lethal weapons, just make sure you don’t seriously hurt our students. They will drop out as soon as they lose half their health, okay~?”

“Then what about you two?”

“Oh, try your best to kill us if you can~ Oh, and don’t worry, we will return everything even if you die~”

“Oy, watch it little girl, I wouldn’t be so cocky if I were you.” A scruffy looking teen with a head of dirty blond hair marches himself forward toward Till, with his two swords rattling.

Niji grabs the teen before he can get any closer to Till. “Woah, Sable, chill out.” Niji turns to Till. “Sorry, he didn’t mean any offense.”

Till narrows her eyes and beams a wide smile. “None taken.”

Rick in the mean time can only look on while massaging his temples. There’s a familiar chill going up and down his spine, like when he’s about to be attacked by Bell. He turns to look at the smiling Till, who reminds him of another “tiger with a smiling face” from Bell’s family, and involuntarily shivers.

...

“Hm... I guess we will have to wait until they are done before we can deal with the elders.” Cori directs the kids and Gui to a spot that was made for them to spectate in.

...

“Are you ready?” Echo asks everyone within the duel as he looks left and right. “Remember, try to avoid seriously injuring the children. They are out if they exit the field or if they are on the ground.”

The people on Niji's side nod their heads, the newer members doing so impatiently. Till nods, still maintaining her smile. Rick readies himself, giving the opposing side a somewhat pitying look. The selected students make minute adjustments non-stop since this is the first time they are having a proper fight, the training they did never taught them how to manage their nervousness - which requires experience rather than training.

“Start!” Echo shouts while backing away to a safe distance. He's going to be refereeing the match, so he's allowed within the field, but he starts running away since his instinct is screaming at him to get away.

“«Air Lance»~!” A thin, powerful breeze brushes by Echo as soon as the match starts, towards the teenager with the twin swords. “«Rising Tempest»~!” \*fuuuu\* “«Rain of Hammers«!” Within one breath, Till sends the teenager flying backward, before getting tossed upward into the air. As he approaches the edge of the field in a daze, multiple condensed «Air Hammer»s attacks him all over the body, before tossing him toward the spectators like a ragdoll.

“What in the...”

“Stop gawking newbie! Gather around!”

“““ «Earth Pillar»”””

Niji reacts quickly as their [Mage]s set up a series of defensive earth barriers. He already considers the party of four as monsters, so he wasn't surprised at the sudden attack, but the power and speed of the attack still leaves him slightly shaken.

\*piku\*

Rick unconsciously gets into a defensive stance as the pity becomes completely apparent on his face. "Poor bastards probably don't know Till was mad at running out of mana during the fight with [Cerebus] and has been training ever since... this is what happens when you poke a sleeping tiger..." The youth mumbles to himself as he half-heartedly prepares himself for battle, he has a feeling he might not have much to do.



# An Unexpected Show (Down)

“Start!”

“«Air Lance»~!” *0.7 second until impact, inserting secondary mana stream...*

“«Rising Tempest»~!” *Argh, I’m still using too much mana?* The accessories on my hand give off a warmth in warning. It’s so much easier to know what I did wrong with this tool, Headmistress was amazing to be able to make this.

\*fuuuu\*

I exhale a quick breath to calm myself as I make a mental note to correct the spell parameters the next time. I start concentrating on the scattered mana from the first two spells and invoke the third spell.

A user’s Avatar follows the rules of the real world, it just has a numeric value instead of an instinctive feel. Since that’s the case, I should aim the condensed «Air Hammer»s carefully... solar plexus, the temples, patellas, tarsals, cubiti, carpals, proboscis, back of the cranium, top of the cranium, cervical vertebrae, beneath the clavicle, thoracic vertebrae...

[ED: “A user’s Avatar follows the rules of the real world, it just has a numeric value instead of an instinctive feel.” means? T/N: I smack you upside the head, you are stunned, the stun comes up as a timer instead of “oh, I can’t move”. ED: That makes perfect sense, I feel dumb.]

[T/N: In layman’s term for those weird words -in sequence-, center of

chest, the space between the respective eye and ear, the kneecaps, the ankles, the elbows, the wrists, the nose, the back of the head, the top of the head, the back of your neck, beneath the collarbone, center of the back. **Dear gods she's vicious.]**

“«Rain of Hammers»!”

*Arrrrrrrggghhhhh, so hard to control them properly...*

I close my eyes briefly to refocus as the arrogant boy is tossed limply outside of the field. Even though half the hammers missed their spots, it should still be enough to stun him significantly.

“What in the...”

“Stop gawking newbie! Gather around!”

“““«Earth Pillar»”””

“Oh~ that’s some quick reactions~”

“Um... Anue, what should we do?” One of the youths with a short lion’s mane asks me while tensely holding up a wooden shield between himself and the sudden earth fortress.

“Have Po’am and Li’lu cast some water spells~ All of you will have to figure out how to deal with this yourselves~”

“Yes! Anue!” The youth turns toward his siblings and classmates. “Assault team! Run interference!”, “Water Mages, soak them!”, “The rest of you, disperse and defend! Treat this as a defensive retreat! Go!”

Out of the twelve demihumans, four are noted for being exceptional in their ability to fight as warriors, three are mages with two focusing on water while one focuses on wind, like Till. The remaining five are from

the Logistics class and the Tactics and Strategy classes. Aside from the lion-maned youth, the last group consists of four non-combatants out of these remaining five. These four carry no weapons while each of them carries a wooden large shield that can be passed as a substitute for tabletops.

“«Surge»!”

“«Aqua Volley»!”

The two [Water Mage]s immediately cast their respective [Spell]s onto the walls of earth while the warriors split into two pairs, with one of each pair switching out their swords for bolas. The remaining six demihumans spread themselves out along the edges of the field. I see their training being put to use as I fall back and let them take center stage.

\* \* \* \* \*

“Commander.”

“How are they doing?”

“Except for one, they were treated very well. Also...”

“Also...?”

“They said they’d seen some demihuman slaves to the west, in the Arlan Range, when Niji and his companions went to a certain quarry to complete some quests for the local administrator and for something called ‘grinding for levels’.”

Sekn maintains a stern expression. “Good, tell them to keep it up, and the one that was maltreated, tell him he can return to [Cerebus] once

he's outside the academy."

The task that Sekn had asked of the Immortals of the Academy, when they first agreed to join, was simple. Spread the news that "defeating" [Cerebus] will give them an item to summon a Cadejo mount - this was done with the consent of [Cerebus] of course. This was a three-fold plan. First, it will protect [Cerebus] from being actually defeated, even though [Cerebus] is ancient and powerful, these Immortals might one day truly defeat her, like the possibility when Bell managed to get onto her neck. In that case, it would be better for her to feign defeat and give out a Cadejo for each "defeat" as prize. Secondly, both the [Cerebus] and Sekn can keep tabs on the war potentials of the Immortals. Lastly, by spreading the Cadejo that are now masterless -since their partners died during the inferno that greeted them when they first arrived and the subsequent hibernations-, Sekn can gather news around the region with the help of these Immortals without drawing any attention to himself.

The only problem is that these masterless Cadejos are currently all with the same group of people. As a result, news is rather limited. But, it will be only a matter of time before other Immortals will try to defeat the [Cerebus]. If experience is any indication, more Immortals will come as news that she is "defeatable" spreads.

"Yes, Commader."

"Alright, let's head back before we are missed." Sekn starts walking back toward the field after giving the order.

""Yes, sir!""

\* \* \* \* \*

The fight started in earnest when the Immortals finally sent out «Earth Lance»s one after another toward where Till and her group were standing, immediately after they released the earthen walls. Niji felt something was off after a series of weak attacks against the «Earth Pillar»s, thus ordering the shift in tactics. Originally, he wanted to drag the opponents into a close range battle since he's rightfully fearful of the [Wind] spells.

Unlike the past him, Niji no longer looks at the [Wind Mage] as a weak support class, especially after finally having one join his guild, [Atone-ment], a while back. The low level [Mage] turned out to be invaluable in their subsequent conquests of the [Barghest Dungeon] by using similar techniques to what Till did the first time around. Although [Wind Mage]s have low power in terms of raw strength, they are very flexible in their support and can use the environment to their advantage, limited by their power and imagination, not to mention the [Spell]'s near invisibility when it is casted. What's most fearsome though, is that they can be long range specialists, which make them hard to target since they simply need to use their allies as shields and escape when necessary before harassing the opponents again.

The «Earth Lance»s were mercilessly hammered down by Till's «Air Hammer»s before they could even travel half their distance to the [Water Mage]s in front of them. Upon seeing the halfhearted surround tactics employed by the demihumans, the melee-based Immortals charged out of their formation at the two pairs of demihumans at the left and right of the group and the pair of [Water Mage]s in front. The pair of [Archer]s on Niji's side started harassing the five demihumans that are lining the outer reaches of the battlefield, who simply turtled behind their large shields. The three Immortal [Mage]s' focus remained on Till since she can remove someone from the battle in an instance.

As soon as the melee-based Immortals get within striking distance of the demihumans on the left side of the battlefield, the demihumans retreat suddenly. It is around this point that Sekn and his aides reappear and take a seat nonchalantly at a previously arranged spot that's out of the way.

"Summer's Parch!" One of the demihumans standing at the outer reaches of the field shouts. [T/N: ?? ?]

"““«Dust Devil»”””” The other 4 demihumans shouts in unison. A small tornado appears where the attacked pair of demihumans were, sending mud -produced by the barrage of water [Spell]s previously- all over the attacking Immortals.

"Heee ya~!" Till shouts while pointing toward the muddied Immortals.

"“«Earth Pillar»””

\*\*Gaaaa\*\*

\*fyu\* \*Kan\*

Two earthen walls raise out of the ground next to the mud-covered melees as they try to remove the mud from their eyes. A formless arrow flies out from Rick's bow towards the other melees attacking the other pair of demihumans on the right side, causing a metallic sound to ring out as it strikes someone in the head, making it tilt up and to the side. The demihuman pair took advantage of the strike, one of them immediately releasing her bolas at the nearest unaffected melee and starts throwing daggers. With the muddied ground underfoot, the Immortals have a hard time dodging the assault, thus resorting to merely standing their ground while blocking with their shields. The

demihuman with the sword and shield silently starts a crouching run and stabs the stunned Immortal in the throat before running back.

On the other side, the other pair safely retreated with the help of the miniature tornado and threw bolas at the group approaching their [Water Mage]s, managing to tie one opponent up and making him fall face first onto the muddied ground, leaving Niji standing alone. The pair of [Mage]s took advantage of that by using «Surge» and «Aqua Volley», which Niji dodged with ease. Unfortunately for the his teammate who's on the ground, he's completely soaked from the sudden wave of water and bruised from the heavy arcing balls of water that smashed down on him.

In just one moment, the Immortals end up being in an unfavourable position. The five ranged Immortals are unharmed, but of the eight Immortal melees that went against the three groups of two demihumans, they are all hamstrung. The three on the left are covered in mud, Niji is alone facing off against two [Water Mage]s with a bound teammate at his feet. While on the right, one is ruled “dead” by the referee and the two remaining melees are on slippery, muddy ground as they cautiously try to defend themselves.

\*biii\*

Till sticks out her tongue while pulling down one of her eyelids. Niji's guildmates can only fume and look around cautiously as she taunts them. One of the things Till learned during her recent study about commerce is that psychological warfare is sometimes even more effective than actually injuring your foes. Using the cocky youth as a punching bag for her [Spell]s caused the opponents to pay excessive attention to her, allowing her allies to exploit any potential openings.

“Go out Le’oni~ let me see what you lot have planned~” Till smiles as

she goes back to standing with her feet shoulder width apart after giving the lion-maned youth a quick instruction.

“Um... should I still attack?” Rick looks a little out of place since he feels like he isn’t even needed in the fight.

“Just cover them, and don’t get killed~”

...

“Regroup! Cover us!” Niji starts reorganizing his team, dragging the mud-soaked teammate at his feet back toward the ranged users. The other melees starts pulling back as well, with earth pillars appearing whenever the demihuman fighters get too close. The [Archer]s busy themselves as they send arrows continuously at Rick and Till.

“Damn it! How can these weaklings toy with us like this?!”

“Weaklings? God damn it newb, stop being so cocky just because you helped beat [Cerebus]. Those two, along with two others, pretty much took on [Cerebus] by themselves! And these guys are trained by them. Get that through that thick skull of yours! Before you end up like that idiot that got sent flying!”

“Calm down, Daisy. Those two weren’t there, they are just ignorant.”

\*fuuuu\*

“Yes, calm down, revise our strategy. Mages, buy us some time while I try to think of something.” Niji lets out a sigh while trying to calm the situation.

“““Yes!”””

...



The fight stalls as Niji's group remains protected within the walls of earth that pop up whenever the demihumans try to attack. Till, and by extension, Rick, simply stand around near the rear as they wait for the inevitable assault by Niji and his teammates. The [Water Mage]s moves around while casting [Spell]s quietly non-stop, but no visible effect appears.

\*Gaaaaaa\* \*Gaaaaaa\* \*Gaaaaaa\*

A series of earth pillars with varying heights completely surrounds Niji's group.

"Get ready!" The lion-maned youth gives the order while lowering his stance and positioning himself between the walls and the [Water Mage]s behind him.

"“Earth Lance!””

Two cone shaped slabs of earth fly out from the left and right of the earthen walls. The demihuman fighters react quickly and retreat slightly toward the center.

"“Autumn's Arrival!”” [T/N: ?? ?]

"“Winter's Thaw!”” [T/N: ?? ?]

"““““«Air Hammer!»”””””” All five demihumans at the edge of the field shout in unison once more. Till joins in as well, shattering the other speeding cone of earth.

"«Earth Pillar!»”

\*Gaaaaa\* \*pyu pyu\*

As soon as the rest of the earthen wall crumbles, a new one arrives. Unexpectedly, [Archer]s are dropping down onto the raising pillars from the air and start shooting at the [Water Mages]. They had climbed to the top of the previous pillar in preparation, the new pillar is made slightly further back, giving them a temporary foothold on the high-ground. Le'oni managed to block the arrows in time for one of the [Water Mage]s, but the other one is hit numerous times in the chest and is ruled "out" by Echo. The rest of the demihumans look up at the sudden attackers, from below, while raising their shields.

""Resting Winter's Midmorning!"" [T/N: ?? ?]

""""«Air Lance»!"""" Six voices ring in unison as a pair of invisible masses slam the exposed [Archer]s in their chests, sending them flying toward the ground from their position ten odd meters from above.

""«Earth Lance!»"" A pair of earthen cones flies toward the demihumans on the right.

""Summer's Parch!""

""""«Air Hammer»!""""

""«Backslide»!""

""«Reinforce»!""

""Go! «Linear Thrust»! «Defensive Stance»!""

The cones of earth turn to rubble, at the same time, Niji's group -who were holding onto the cones- used their respective skills while jumping off. Niji and two others glide backward toward the center, their forward momentum suddenly reversing. Two [Warrior]s wielding an axe and sword respectively with their shields tighten their body and

temporarily strengthen it while they get launched by the two [Guardian]s, sending them right into the unsuspecting pair of demihuman fighters on the right side of the battlefield.

\*pyu pyu pyu pyu\*

“Damn it! «Rapidfire»!” Rick is the first to react since he’s the only one that wasn’t really doing anything aside from watching. He sends a barrage of formless arrows at the three that are gliding back toward the center.

“Go Niji!”

“Get them boss!”

\*shi shi shi shi\*

Rick’s arrows cut into the two leather-clad fighters from Niji’s side as they use their own bodies as shields and run forward.

“«Aqua Volley»!” The lone [Water Mage] steps out from behind Le’oni and fires off a series of the heavy balls of water at the bloodied fighters while Le’oni rushes forward to meet them.

\*dokan\*

“«Backstab»!” Niji’s figure blurs before completely fading, lightly slashing down at the [Water Mage] that’s preoccupied with attacking the two fighters.

\*zushin zushin\*

On the right side of the field, the 2 warriors collided with the demihumans while emitting blazing red auras. Seeing the airborne [Warrior]s,

the demihumans know they can't evade in time and that blocking would be futile, they thus opt for a counter-attack. The users, not expecting them to do something so reckless, pull their shields in tight to their bodies. The demihumans rotate their bodies while absorbing some of the impact, spinning around and slashing down on the users' heads at the last possible moment. The attack is successful, but the impact with the users' strengthened body knocks them both out.

...

““«Earth Pillar»!””

“«Scatter Shot»”

While the melees are fighting, Niji's [Mage]s walled in the pair of demihuman fighters on the left side of the battlefield. The two tried to rush forward at the [Mage]s, but ended up being pelted into the earthen wall formed behind them. They gave up soon after.

Till, trying to prevent the [Guardian]s from reaching the demihumans at the edge of the field, sends them flying with dozens of concentrated «Air Lance»s. [Guardian]s in «Defensive Stance» are notoriously difficult to dislodge, all the more reason for Till to remove them before they become a major threat in the latter part of the battle.

As it stands, Niji and his three [Mage]s remain on his side. On the Academy's side, Till, Rick, Le'oni, one [Wind Mage] and four non-combatants remain.

\*KA\* \*KA\* \*KA\*

Le'oni continues to press Niji as their wooden weapons collide. Le'oni had rushed him after Niji “killed” the [Water Mage]. Le'oni has the defensive advantage with his sword and shield, but Niji is nimble on his

feet, parrying effectively with his wooden daggers.

“Plan C, go!” Niji suddenly throws one of the daggers in his hands at Le’oni’s face before making an amazingly high, acrobatic jump over him.

““«Air Lance»!””

““«Air Hammer»!””

“«Dust Devil»!”

“““«Earth Lance»!”””

The demihumans at the edge shout all at once, sending one of the [Mage]s to the ground. In the mean time, the [Mage]s themselves sends three earth lances at Le’oni in a single file.

“Oh no you don’t! «Rapidfire»” Rick sends a barrage of arrows at the airborne Niji.

“Le’oni~! To your right~! «Air Hammer»~, «Air Hammer»~, «Air Hammer»~” In the mean time, Till tries to hammer the cones of earth heading toward Le’oni. Due to the way the earth [Spell]s are lined up, Till can’t target them effectively and likely won’t be able to destroy them in time.

Le’oni lost sight of Niji after pulling his shield up to stop the dagger flying toward his face, upon hearing Till’s warning, he immediately reacts and turns around, spotting the earthen cones flying toward him. He raises his shield once more and sidesteps, hoping to make it in time. At this moment...

“«Heaven’s Dive»!” Niji suddenly accelerates toward Le’oni after taking two formless arrows to his left shoulder, at the last moment, he

pulls Le'oni down by his right shoulder instead of striking him with the dagger. The «Earth Lance»s continues toward Till and Rick, which Till manages to hammer down in time.

“Man... nice!” Rick couldn't help but praise that display. Likewise, the audience is on the edge of their seat, with the occasional squeal from the over-excited crowd. They have been silently watching the fight, but even they know the climax is coming.

“Focus on one of them at a time! Only one of them is a [Mage], the rest are fakes!” Niji shouts while helping Le'oni up, who proceeds to walk out of the field sheepishly, understanding that the pull on his shoulder could have easily been a dagger to his head. Likewise, the other demi-humans walk off the field as well since their cover is blown, the [Wind Mage] is too exposed to be of much help in this situation.

[T/N: Niji is a slllllyyyy bugger, instead of just knocking Le'oni out, he dragged him down so that he can buy time to tell his mages what to do when he helps him up]

“Hehehe~ Good job figuring that out~”

“God damn it you two, this isn't 14 vs 14, it was 14 vs 10! And you guys are still kicking our asses... Argh, Let's finish this!” Niji is still optimistic that he can at least get a draw now that it's 3 vs 2.

Rick proceeds to scratch his head. “Umm... I don't recomme-”

“Okay~, «Rising Tempest»~ ... «Tears of Lament»!” Till bolts to the sky boosted by her [Spell] before aiming downward with concentrated «Air Lance»s. Activating the accessory on her left arm, she use the Ring of the Crystal Mirror, the Ring of Dancing Fae and the water mana stored within the vambrace itself. She makes minute

adjustments at the last second to prevent her [Spell] from actually hitting them.

\*dokkan dokkan dokkan dokkan dokkan dokkan dokkan dokkan dokkan dokkan ...\*

...

\*Uuuuuuuuu\*

“Damn it, Till, you didn’t have to hit me too!” Rick is rubbing his left arm and shoulder while groaning since he dove out of the field as Till’s attacks seemed like they were going to hit him.

“Your own fault for running around~ It wouldn’t have hurt you if you didn’t move~”

\*Uuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuuu\*

Miserable groans come from nearby as Niji and his group make their way to where Till and Rick are. The audience, on the other hand, are all talking in loud, excited voices.

“What... on... earth... was THAT?” Niji points to the field with shaking fingers, filled with watery craters, as he limps toward them while assisted by his least injured teammate - the first one to be sent out of the field. The youth is stopped by Niji about a dozen paces away from the two before making his way over on his own. The youth can only stare at Till with terror in his eyes, he was merely “stunned and tossed”, so he ended up watching the fight from the sideline once the stun-effect wore off after some of the demihumans dragged him to a safe spot.

“Just a lot of «Air Lance»s~”

“Filled with water?! I can’t imagine the result if you hit us dead on with that... Argh... we’ve a long way to go before we reach your level...” Niji is well aware that he and his teammates weren’t targeted by the spell on purpose, yet they can’t even stand up after just getting hit by the shrapnel kicked up from the impact, let alone being hit by it.

[ED: FLUID DYNAMICS - THE COMPRESSIBILITY OF WATER IS 4% BY VOLUME, EFFECTIVELY AN INCOMPRESSIBLE SUBSTANCE THAT CAN SIMPLY BE CONSIDERED USING PENETRATION IMPACT CALCULATIONS AT IT’S DENSITY SINCE THEY ALREADY ACCOUNT FOR THE FACT THAT HIGH SPEED IMPACTS OPERATE ON EVERYTHING BEHAVING AS A FLUID.

Vis-a-vis - watah hurt nigguh]

“Don’t worry about it, you did good, getting those archers up there... attacking your teammates to send them flying... and that jump! Damn it, if I know how to jump like that, I might have won against that captain!” Rick consoles Niji while recalling his own fight with the Feian Captain.

“How did you figure out we only had another mage instead of five~?” Till nods cutely, agreeing with Rick.

“When they shouted different things and only one of my mages got hit.”

“Damn, you noticed that?” Rick raises an eyebrow.

Niji flashes a triumphant grin before turning looking left and right, speaking in hushed tones. “Are you guys raising an army here to take over a kingdom or what? Count me in if you guys are doing something interesting. Those were just kids right? And you’ve an actual army just



doing escort duties!”

“Ha... Ha... Ha...” The blonde youth laughs uneasily.

“Don’t worry about it~ But we will let you know if we are up to something interesting~”

“That’s a promise!” Niji turns his head as he notices some figures approaching. “Looks like your NPCs want you for something, I’ll be on my way then.” He gives them a quick salute before heading toward his guildmates, with the still shellshocked teen in tow.

“Hohoho, that was a most excellent duel!” The group of Elders make their way over, under the escort of the demihumans. Elder Markus was the first to speak.

“Glad you enjoyed it~”

“We noticed four of the youths on your team weren’t fighters... why was that?”

“It’s for their training, in case of a sudden war, even non-combatants will have to play a role if they are to survive. At least that’s what my family keeps telling me. Even if they can’t fight, they can still be eyes and ears, as well as distractions.”

The Elders nod sagely in agreement.

“Excellent, excellent. I was wondering... is there a limit to how many students you are willing to accept?”

“I was going to ask that, Elder Markus.”

“Actually, I wonder if I can enroll my nieces and nephews as well.”

“Oh ho, I was just thinking the same thing, although I also want to send some of my servant’s children here as well.”

...

The talk ended up with the Elders competing for enrollment spots for the Academy. They got loud during their discussions, to the point that the other Nobles in their entourage overheard them and joined into the fray. After reassuring that there will be enough spots for everyone, the crowd finally calms down.

...

“Greetings Headmaster, Miss, Elders.” Cori greets them with a shallow bow at the waist while bringing his right arm forward in a sweeping motion. He finally managed to introduce himself after the commotion.

The group acknowledge him with slight movements and a nod, before turning their head at the creature next to him.

“I’m from a village near Feia, there’s som-”

“Eh?!” Till suddenly releases a voice in surprise as Gui goes up to her and climbs onto her shoulders with his paws, sniffing.

“Little girl, do you know my brother?” Gui continues to sniff her while tilting his head back and forth.

# Mustering

[T/N: The title is ???, I am pretty sure it means Muster as it's the only word in the dictionary with the various meanings that makes sense in context. If anyone have a better suggestion, do let me know -sauce is required as always-]

“What are you doing, you pervert?!” Rick grabs the gray fox roughly by its torso from behind before throwing him off of Till. Rick has been keeping up with the news on the various forums, the animal avatar is new and apparently extremely hard to use. It’s mostly agreed upon that only those truly dedicated or perverted would use the avatar. Seeing the sniffing action, Rick has assumed that Gui is a pervert.

Gui, accustomed to being roughly handled, simply resumes sniffing the air, circling the blonde youth this time instead.

“Hey, stay away! I don’t swing that way!” Rick turns his head left and right as the fox circles him. “I said stay away, you pervert!” The youth gives Gui a swift kick, who lightly jumps away. The Elders, demihumans and Cori’s group can only watch on with stunned silence.

“You! Don’t bick on Mr. Gui!” A little girl with curly blonde hair and emerald eyes runs up to Rick and gives him a quick kick in the shin before diving at the fox. Gui, not wanting her to get hurt, absorbs the impact by stepping back after she got a hold of him and intentionally tumbles onto the floor.

“Charlotte!” Cori runs up to the four of them and picks the girl up. “I’m so sorry.” The brown-haired man repeatedly bows toward Rick with Charlotte in his arms.

“Oh~ Don’t worry~ right, Rick-ni?” Till tries to defuse the situation since the Elders and the guards finally snapped out of it and they are staring needles at the girl and the fox. She turns her eyes to the pre-occupied fox who is sniffing the ground at the moment. “Say~ Who’s your brother anyways~?”

“Brother is Brother!” The gray fox answers loudly, looking slightly proud.

“Yes~ But what do others call him~?” Till is accustomed to looking after young children, the way the fox behaves reminds her of her adopted siblings when they were younger.

“Oh, everyone else call him Kun. But he’s my brother, so only I get to call him brother.” The fox sits up straight with its head held high, looking extremely proud.

““KUN?!””

\* \* \* \* \*

Greetings readers! We have some great exclusives for you this week! There seems to be complete silence from Leviathan ever since the release of the animal Avatar, but that’s because they were working on some new features! Starting next week, we will have live updates to our weapon usage!

According to numerous anonymous sources, the company has been busy working with real live masters of various martial arts. The sources are from within the company itself, there seems to be an upcoming event relating to exploration, the information is sketchy, but apparently immense resources have been poured into it. With these two tidbits of information, it's clear that the next update will be substantial!

In other news, an anti-Missouri coalition has formed in the central region of the continent. Numerous requests from NPCs as well as users sick of the tyrannical rule of the Church of Latter Day Saviours reached the point of no return! Skirmishes are a daily occurrence, there's even a rumour that a Cult of Vengeance appeared, led by a deified player! The incoming update might prove to be the deciding factor on who will win this war, we will keep our eyes peeled for the time being.

The coming weeks will prove to be the most exciting yet! Stay tuned, OneWingedPegasus signing out. For more information or the latest news, check out various portals below.

\* \* \* \* \*

“Eh?”

“Hmm? Something the matter, Kun?”

“Ah, it can wait.”

Right now, Kun and Hank are supervising the last explanation of the rules to the last few batches of new arrivals. Various men and women are paying close attention to the speaker, who was one of the first to arrive and has thus already been trained by Kun and Hank. Many of these men and women are disfigured in one way or another, some are missing fingers, limbs, and even facial features such as eyes and ears. The few who are whole have scars in obvious places, making them look dangerous and ferocious, or are paralyzed in one way or another.

“And most important of all, no illicit drugs or heavy alcohol consumption. If you absolutely can’t stand it anymore, let one of us know and we will find a way to help you discreetly. But if you try to hide it and use it secretly, we will know. There is no “first time offender” leniency, if you screw up, you are getting thrown out, period. So fess up either now or afterward, we will get you help, don’t wait until it’s too late. I don’t think I have to tell you this, but this is a rare opportunity. There is no shame in this, we are all the bloody same here, we all survived the wars only to be treated like trash. We might not know each other’s pain, but we all know we suffered. Shame? Pride? These shitty things won’t feed us, and only those lazy hypocrites have the luxury for them. We don’t give a shit about those useless things here. Okay, dismissed. Gather ‘round if you need to talk after.” The one speaking at the front of the room ends the talk and reaches for his crutches as he moves away from the podium towards the nearby desk, handing out papers as each individual leaves.

The various men and women start exiting the room after getting the papers, but a handful of them remain. Some look sheepish while others are biting their lips. These are more than likely the addicts.

“Want me to take care of this, Andrew?”

“Nah, Hank. I’ll show them where they will be working first, and then give them some options. If I still can’t help them, I will get you.” The man hands out a stack of paper to each of the remaining individuals before advancing out of the room with his two crutches as his lower legs are completely useless. “Alright people, there’s basically three ways to do this, work it out of your system, go cold turkey or taper it off. I recommend a combination of the first and last option, you will see why once I show you where you will be working.” The man makes his way to the console room with the rhythmic \*da\* of his crutches leading the way.

A total of about 117 personnel has been recruited by Hank. Out of these 117, 19 have been immediately expelled due to unbecoming conducts, as these people were beyond redemption. Out of the remaining 98, about a third are addicts of one sort or another. The majority of them either suffer depression, PTSD or are just simply impoverished. But out of all these recruits, about two dozen of them have sharp, keen eyes, as they are fully aware of the opportunity that’s laying before their eyes. Some are eager for work as proper humans, some are eager for the money promised to send to their families, some are eager due to the freedom the job represents.

Hank and Kun start cleaning up the room after everyone leaves, gathering the papers, aligning the chairs, picking up the odd piece of rubbish.

“So what do you think?”

“I hope we didn’t recruit too many people.”

“Don’t worry, Kun. A bunch of these will be in treatment first, and quite a lot of them will be working offsite in the city as part time

workers.” Hank scratches his face a little. “Although I think I might have overestimated the dropout rate a little. We might have excess manpower...”

“It just means we need to work hard and show some clear results, it wouldn’t be a problem if we get more business by summer. And don’t worry about excess manpower, I know a place that can use them.”

“Alright, we are done here. I’m going to check up on the others.”

“See you at dinner.” Kun turns off the light as they leave the room. After closing the door, he looks down at his wristwatch with the email icon flashing. He makes his way back to his house, greeting the various employees on the way out.

It’s already November, fast approaching December, the air is crisp and sharp, with the occasional cold breeze cutting through the air. Kun taps his boots at the door sill before opening the door to his home with the afternoon sun shining on his back. Although there’s no snow, there’s frost on the ground, which can get the doorway muddy if he lets it melt inside. Making his way to a terminal, he checks his email.

“What...?” Quickly getting up, he rushes to the room with the un-powered console. “Huh? Then where is he? Gui? You here?” After checking the house, Kun gives up. Once he finishes plugging in the console and booting it up, he logs onto «Second Phantasia» for the first time in a while.

\* \* \* \* \*

Till sent an email directly to Kun after the gray fox’s proclamation. Shortly after, Cori resumes his business with the Elders. Although the Elders treat Rick and Till with reverence, they barely listened to Cori’s



plea for help in regards to the village. But the matter concerning the children ended up being settled quickly, Till's emotionless stares quietly coerced the Elders into either accepting the children into their respective families or ending up being enrolled in the Academy instead of going to an orphanage. As the final business started to wrap up...

[T/N: I don't know if I'm more afraid of a smiling Till or an emotionless Till...]

\*haa haa haa\*

A figure appears suddenly from the direction of the Academy's main building, charging toward them at high speed. It abruptly stops before the group, while taking deep breaths.

"Gui?"

"Kun?"

"Brobaa?" Gui struggles to talk as some of the children are leaning their weight onto his head.

\*buri buri\*

The gray fox gives a quick shake, getting out of the grips of the children.

"How did you log in?"

"Log in?"

Kun makes a face as he tries to simplify his words. "Where did you sleep to get here?"

"Oh, I went to the quietest cabin with four beds."

\*kunka kunka\*

"You smell different, Brother." As Gui walk up to Kun to get a closer

sniff, Kun falls down like a ragdoll. "Brother?! Brother?!" The gray fox turns toward Cori with a pleading look. "What happened to Brother?"

"Um... he just logged out... Gui was it?" Rick tries to help uncomfortably, as it seems that Gui is who he claims to be.

...

*Gui, can you hear me?*

"Eh? Brother? Where are you?" The fox circles the collapsed vessel of Kun, occasionally poking it with his nose as he continues to sniff.

*Um... first things first, how long have you been using this?*

"Since the first time with the blinking bo- umm... blinking panel!"

Silence follows, as Till, Rick, Cori, the children, the Elders and the guards look at the seemingly one sided conversation with the fox talking to itself.

*Okay, then why did you keep eh... coming in here?*

"Because I couldn't sleep with all the banging and sawing. Oh, and because these nice people give me some yummy bread." Gui's tail perks up suddenly as drool slowly collects at the corner of his mouth.

*Do you... like it here?*

"It's good for sleeping, it's fun, it has yummy food, oh, did you know they have these rabbits with big claws? They are very plump and juicy..." The drool from his mouth has started to drip onto the grass.

\*fuuuuuuu\*

A long silence is followed by a long sigh. *Okay, just don't cause trouble, and remember to follow the rules. Okay?*

“What rules?” Gui’s head tilts to the side as it decides to sit still next to Kun’s vessel.

*I will explain later, I will log back in first.*

“What is this ‘log’ thing? Everyone keeps using it and it doesn’t sound like it’s related to the trees at all.” An answer didn’t come as the voice inside Gui’s head vanishes. He starts looking around restlessly.

“Log’ is what you do when you go from sleeping on the machine to come play here~ or to go back when you stop playing~”

“Oh... fake sleeping and waking up from fake sleeping! I get it now!”

“Smart boy~” Till pats Gui’s head, who rubs his head into her hand.

The rest of the people can only watch on as the scene before them continues to baffle them with its absurdity. The 3rd Elder was the first to realize something and approaches Cori.

“Mr... Cori, was it?”

“Yes?”

“Who is this gentleman here.”

“He is the Immortal Hero that saved the village.”

“No, I mean, how is he related to the Academy...”

“I’ve no idea, although I hear his brother is really amazing.”

The Elder starts sweating bullets as he realizes that they shouldn’t have dismissed this Cori so quickly. “Umm... you know what, I think my family might be able to provide some help to the village...”

Hearing the sudden good news, Cori’s expression changes from a slightly sullen one to a bright one.

Suddenly, the Immortal vessel’s torso snaps straight up. “Ah, sorry about that, had to umm... ask my brother a few questions.” As soon as he finishes, Kun twists his body and locks Gui into his arms before ruffling his neck. Gui, used to this kind of play fighting, nips Kun in the chin before squirming his body, sliding out of his grip.

Rick stares at the two as though they are perverts.

Till stares at them as though she wants to join in.

The Elders stare at them in trepidation.

The shadow stares at the scene with narrowed eyes before disappearing.

The children stare at Kun as though he’s the new big boss.

Cori stares at Kun in disbelief.

The guards stares at Gui with curiosity.

“Eh... what’s the occasion?” Kun finally realizes that there is an unusually large amount of visitors surrounding him and starts looking around in earnest.

“Nothing much Kun-ni~ These Elders are just paying their respects cause the you-know-what worked and they all got a kid now~”

“Oh, congratulations!” Kun beams while giving each of the Elders a handshake. “Alright, I’m going to log back out now. Have to finalize some stuff before I can play with you guys again.” The young man leans so that only Till and Rick can hear him. “Keep an eye on Gui for me please. Also, I’ll be bringing some instructors-in-training soon, so can you two check if any of the students are interested in melee combat, strategies, or wilderness survival training?”

The two of them nod while Kun retreats back into the main building. “Oh, remember to come for dinner Gui. We are going to have dinner with everyone.”

\* \* \* \* \*

Most of the visitors left the Academy at first light, but there is a handful that decided to stay behind. Using the excuse of “inspecting the classes and facilities”, a few Elders’ chamberlains, some Nobles and others opted to stay behind for half a day.

...

## Dawn - Tactics and Strategies Class

“We need to refine the existing system.”

“No, the existing system doesn’t work! Look at the failure from last night!”

“What are you talking about?! Last night was a success!”

“Failure! They had to withdraw!”

“Success! They managed to contribute to the fight!”

“What’s going on here? Where are the teachers?” A middle aged woman asks Isnac sternly.

“The senseis only directly teach the class once in a while, the rest of the time is self-training and group-study. Right now, the students are likely analyzing last night’s duel.” Isnic answers tacitly, as though it’s obvious. She stops just outside the classroom to allow the so called inspection to proceed. The chamberlains and Nobles had originally hoped to curry favour with the Immortals, but due to the current time difference between Earth and Amoatlz, Till and Rick had to log out to sleep. As such, they are forced to tour the Academy.

“Using the calendar as directional reference takes too long!”

“It’s the easiest to understand!”

“It isn’t efficient!”

“So what, it’s useless if everyone else doesn’t know what you are doing. How can you be useful if you can’t communicate properly!”

\*Ta Ta Ta\*

“Look, if the situation is like this, calling it out would take too long!”

\*Ta Ta Ta Ta\*

“But, if the situation is like this, using any other system would be too confusing!”

The young students are vigourously moving the figures about on a map as they argue their respective positions passionately.

“Hmph, what do these children know about strategies? This is a waste of time if the teacher isn’t teaching them.” A man of nobility that looks to be in his late-20s snorts in contempt.

“If you want, you may face any of the students in this class in any of these wargames. Le’oni,” Isnic calls out to the youth that was a part of

the duel last night, “this gentleman would like to be a sparring partner for your class, take care of him.”

“Yes, sis-, Yes, Ma’am!” The lion-maned youth corrects himself quickly before sizing up the Noble. “You don’t look too bright, maybe Jo’en would be a good enough match for you.”

The man gives an incredulous look while the tour group moves on.

...

The group inspects the farming fields, the workshops, the barracks and the archery range. As breakfast approaches, the group -joined by a frazzled looking Noble- at the cafeteria. After a small commotion with the various Nobles demanding to know the source for the tea -which was solved by threats of expelling them out of the Academy grounds for causing disruption, backed by a nearby patrol of demihuman soldiers-, they head back out onto the fields. Aside from the main field where the duel had taken place, the students and soldiers are busy setting up nettings and equipment.

“What are they doing now?” The stern woman from before asks again, out of everyone here, she’s the one that always questions Isníc. At the same time, she pays the most attention to the finest of details, most notably when they were at the farming fields.

“They are setting up for the morning practical.”

“Morning practical?”

“The classes are divided into morning, afternoon and evening. Students in non-combatant classes have to complete an obstacle course, with the soldiers attacking with long range weapons. Students that

take classes in any combat based courses will have to undergo a different practical each day. These practicals are based on something from Rick-sensei's hometown."

The group advances from one field to the next as both the students and soldiers themselves participate in the training. A few of the guards responsible for their safe return also join in the exercises due to the novelty. Needless to say, they are slightly better than the students. Nevertheless, almost everyone is impressed due to its mimicry of real life situations, practicality, and irregularity.

"Ms. Isníc, how does one apply to be a scholar here?"

Everyone turns toward the voice in surprise, a man with brown hair faces the harpy-like demihuman with a bright expression.

\* \* \* \* \*

"What... the... hell...?" Rick is staring into the air, as soon as he logs in, where the Quest tab is. On it, it has 896 unread messages.

He absentmindedly heads toward the study since it's midnight at the moment, even though it's just after sunset on Earth. The slight time difference causes minor hindrances, but users laud it as a feature since it allows them to experience «Second Phantasia»'s various times of day.

"Eh~ What's the matter, Rick-ni~?" Till is inside the study as well, reading a book by the candlelight.

"Apparently I've... followers now?" The blonde youth continuously pushes the confirm icon that pops up after acknowledging each request. Most of them are requests for blessings, prayers for safe



childbirth, a few desperate prayers for pregnancy and the occasional gifts in the form of prayer and experience.

“Eh~? You are joking right, Rick-ni~?” The girl quickly closes her book and places it gently on the table with a \*pa\* before approaching the youth. “Mom didn’t mention anything about followers...”

“Does it look like I’m joking?” Rick continues to poke at the transparent confirm button that’s only visible to him.

“Why don’t you just sort the messages and deal with them as a group~?”

“Oh, right!” Rick slaps himself on the forehead with his palm. After sorting the messages, his expression changes suddenly.

“What~?”

“I’ve a quest here... ‘Save the Norman Kingdom’s 1st Princess’... How the hell did I get this?” The blonde youth scratches his right eyebrow.

“Ehhhhhhh~ So Rick-ni finally shows his true colours and went after a princess~?”

\*zichi\* \*pachi\*

Rick swings his hand suddenly down at Till’s head, who stops it by clapping her hands together above her head.

\*biiii\*

She sticks out her tongue in defiance.

---

“I’ll get you one of these days!”

“Sure~ but what’s the quest about~?”

“I’ve no idea. Everything is in question marks aside from the quest title.”

“Let’s do it~!” The girl with the aquamarine hair smiles at the youth with the candle flame reflected in her eyes. If one isn’t aware, she can easily be mistaken for a demon of the night.

# To Norman Kingdom

“Are you sure about this, Uncle Hank? Wouldn’t it be better if I stay and help organize?”

“Well, we thought it over a bit. If you have to do every little thing, you’d be occupied all the time and the organization in turn would become fragile.”

“Hmm... that’s true... if we are to expand, we’d need the ability to scale without us micromanaging everything... guess I’ll take this time to train a bit.”

“Go play with your friends, you haven’t logged in for a while anyways. Just help me gather everyone at that Academy of yours.”

“Hahaha... alright, guess I’ll do just that. Let me get some ingredients for din-”

“Nope, got someone else to deal with that already too, shoo.”

Hank waves Kun away as he continues to write in the ledger where all the vital notes about the training camp is kept.

\* \* \* \* \*

\*fuuuu\*

“Alright guys, shift change!”

“““““Woo!”””””

Several dozen workers mill about in the open work area inside the cold, voluminous, limestone cavern as they start the shift change. Since the start of the Light season in Antarctica, mining has been going nonstop 24/7. With various minerals being extremely scarce, this is a highly lucrative business. A figure in a rough, ragged uniform approaches one of the few mobile structures within the cave.

“Hey, Bel! Isabel! Damn it...”

\*ki-ko\*

The figure climbs up the few steps of stairs hanging off the rectangular shaped, tread-type vehicle and enters into the monitoring station.

“Hey, Bel! Shift change!”

“Huh...? Oh hey, George. Ummm... can you do me a favour and check these values for me?”

“Get outta here already you, your shift’s done. Oh, and Andy and his crew are fine now, they said thanks for covering their asses and will be taking part of your work schedule until it’s all even, and then some.”

“Fine fine, but check this for me first, George.” Isabel’s unruly auburn hair is accompanied by a concerned expression.

“Alright... what’s wrong?”

The burly man with curly blond hair leans down onto the terminal where Isabel is at. He narrows his eyes upon seeing the monitors.

“That...”

“So I’m not seeing things...”

“Alright, I’ll let Engineering figure something out. Go take a proper rest, you’ve been OTing for almost a month already.”

“Damn it, we are going to have to dig another tunnel at this rate, urgh.”

The man shrugs his shoulders.

“It’s par for the course, but damn... nice catch Boss, we will avoid digging in that section for now and mark it for de-comp after the Dark season gets here. Can’t risk an explosion now can we? Now shooooooooooooo and get to the Sun Room, it’s really nice there today.”

“Fiiiiinnnnnnneeeeeee... but give me a report when I get back.” The pale looking woman with auburn hair gets up from the table and starts heading outside the small building.

“You got it, Boss. Remember, Sun Room!”

\* \* \* \* \*

“Need a hand?” A black-haired young man on top of a white, furry blob looks down at a middle-aged man, that’s stumbling unsteadily on his feet, with a smile. Beside the young man is a man and woman, with eyes shining bright as they wave their greetings.

“Kun... I mean, Commander!” The man struggles to stay standing as he gives a salute. A look of disbelief, with grateful moist eyes, is

directed at the mounted young man.

“At ease, we aren’t working at the moment, save it for the greenhorns.”

Kun has been spending the last few hours rounding up the 80 or so of the 98 instructors he had hired with Hank. A group of 6 would log in at once, allowing Kun and Hank to pick up 3 instructors at a time. Although the system allows new users to spawn near any given player, the range is random and can still be quite a distance away [T/N: As was the case with Gui]. To ensure maximum safety, Kun had asked Sekn to deploy his troops evenly within an area of 2 hours travel time by cadejo and safeguard any Immortals that approach them. Additionally, 1 to 2 of the more severely handicapped instructors were set to spawn with each group, thus no one would be harmed by any stray monsters.

Kun had originally planned to mentally prepare his hires, but Andrew - one of the first instructors hired, who happens to not be able to feel anything below his knees - convinced him otherwise. Saying that it would be a nice surprise and would negatively affect the hiring process since people would become too eager to join if they learn that their job would effectively negate their physical disabilities. He would know, he was over the moon when he first logged in and had to relearn how to walk without his crutches.

“You will have to, um, excuse me.” The man couldn’t handle it anymore and tears start falling from his face while he releases himself from the salute.

“No problem, Admak, take a minute. Just a question, you want to ride up top or inside?”

The man is about to retort by instinct before he realize that riding on

top is now indeed a possibility, smiling like an idiot as he finds another meaning to “an itch on the soles of your feet is a good omen” [T/N: ?????????????, I’m not sure if that’s singular or plural, went with plural since it sounds better even though both feet itching at the same time is weird and unlikely :P]. He gives a firm reply of “On top of course!” while wondering where’s the option for riding inside.

Sammy, without needing a command, suddenly starts deflating himself to the surprise of the man and the two passengers next to Kun.

\* \* \* \* \*

“Woah! What’s happening here?!” Rick looks on at the scene of organized chaos as he stands at the entrance of the Academy’s main building. The newly flattened field that was formerly filled with craters is bustling with activity. Sekn is seated in front of a portable table in the center of the field with Echo, who is busy writing on a piece of vellum. On one side, squads mounted on cadejos stand in formation and a group of them would charge out when another group arrives from the road. On the other side, a group of people Rick hasn’t seen before is acting in a highly chaotic manner.

“Rick-sensei? The usual?” The bushy-tailed demihuman that always fetches the group snacks and drinks arrives with impeccable timing, albeit without Isníc this time. Her attire is sharp and clean, consisting of a casual-formal apparel of a frilly blouse in black and white and a pair of black trousers, this appearance along with her demeanor is starting to give her an aura of a butler.

“Ah, yes please, Mo’mo. What’s going on here?” [T/N: Mo’mo isn’t pronounced Momo, which would be peach in Japanese. I will make a

post in regards to the names at a later date as the editor pointed out that I should provide some explanations]

“Kun-sensei is retrieving the various instructors he’s bringing to the Academy, they are being gathered there.” The demihuman points at the group of people doing seemingly random actions, some are laying motionless on the ground, some are supporting individuals that are walking with stumbling steps, others are either flexing their limbs or patting various parts of their heads and there are a few that are practicing kihon [T/N: ?? is the basics or fundamentals] and kumite [T/N: ?? is often called sparring]. “Sekn-taisho is assisting him and also using this opportunity to perform some military exercises.” Giving him a slight bow, she disappears back inside the building.

“Oh, he’s doing that today...?” Scratching the top of his head with his left hand, he advances toward the field. He had received prior notice by both Kun and Bell of their respective plans, but he haven’t been paying much attention to the details. Since he’s technically the Headmaster of the Academy, Rick feels that he ought to at least greet Kun’s instructors, despite it being bothersome.

Giving Echo a wave, who nods in acknowledgement, the blonde youth exhales deeply with a \*fuuu\* before announcing his presence to the instructors. “Hello, various senseis, I’m Headmaster Rick of the Academy here. Good to have you here!” The various instructors immediately stop what they are doing as they stand at attention and give him a salute. A few of them struggle to stand upright, but manage to do so with some wobbling.

“Thank you, Rick-sama!”

“Um... I think I’m younger than you all, you can just call me Rick.”



“Negative, Sir! Rank is independent of age, Sir!” One of the middle-aged men, with chestnut hair and a burly chest, replies in a loud, deep voice. Others are also nodding in agreement, displaying their level of discipline and sense of values.

Getting somewhat used to this sense of dissonance from past experience, Rick just nods. “Then just call me Rick-sensei, as I am also a teacher here.”

“Understood, Sir!”

“I won’t be bothering you all then, do whatever it is that you were doing.”

“Thank you, Sir!”

Giving the group a nod, Rick heads toward the table where Sekn, Echo and their aides are. Upon him reaching it, Mo’mo appears with a tray and a portal stand, setting the former on the latter next to Rick. “You guys don’t hold back at all when you guys exercise, do you?”

Sekn gives him a wry smile. “It’s not often I get to exercise the troops thoroughly.” He silently gives Echo a kick under the table as he ends his sentence. Echo in return gives off a \*geho\* as he clears his throat.

“Um... Headmaster, I know the agreed upon time period isn’t here yet, but...” Echo pauses a bit and chews on his lips before resuming. “After being here a while, we’ve decided that we’d like to settle here permanently.”

“Okay.” Rick casually grabs a small bun topped with dried fruit, nuts, and honey from the tray and takes a bite.

"Quite a lot of my soldiers are happy here, a lot of them were farmers and craftsman in the first place, I'm sure they'd be-" Sekn gives him a sharp kick that causes even the table to jump, causing the ink bottle to rattle. Echo turns and looks at his commander with a frown.

"He said 'Okay'."

"Then I prepared that speech for noth- I mean, umm... thank you!" Pausing for a second. "Eh, would the others agree though?"

"Yep, we already talked about this in private." The blonde youth quickly replies with a shrug while finishing the rest of the bun, causing everyone present to give him a look of surprise. "Just eh... get Isnica to help you guys, there shouldn't be much change, but just in case, get her to help. We are going to be accepting students soon, we have a bunch of these military instructors here-" Rick jerks his thumb over his shoulder, "-and we will have a scholar helping us out too. So we eh... kind of need your help with construction and stuff, with proper payments of course."

"But of course." Sekn is all smiles with his reply, with similar expressions on the other demihumans present. Traveling on their own, and with the sparse news from the cadejos serving the Immortals, the demihumans have come to realize that they are a rarity in this new land. Every single demihuman aside from those from the Academy that they had seen or heard about, were all slaves in one form or another. Most of the news came from their various supply trips to **Sardon** and **Feia**, although slavery is prohibited in the region, slaves are still slaves even when they enter the various kingdoms. This caused Sekn quite a bit of headache since he needs to permanently settle his troop soon. The idea was to come to the Academy to use it as a base of operations and find a suitable place to search for a location to settle, it just turns out that the Academy is the best suitable place.

“!” Rick suddenly makes a shocked expression as he’s drinking his tea.

Everyone else tenses, fearing that he’d go back on his words.

“Damn! I just realized you guys don’t have the concept of sandwiches here! I need to tell this to Isnica or something...”

The group looks at each other in confusion, muttering “... sandwich?”

[T/N: Sandwich as we know it is a relatively recent invention. The type we are familiar with only came about during the last two centuries or so -Earl of Sandwich as the originator-, it’s more customary to dip the bread into a potage, soup or some other liquid before consuming them. This is also why the “malt” bread sold by the village that got attacked sold so well.

“MMMMMMMMMMMM, it’s good to be back.” Bell appears from behind Rick and grabs one of the buns from the tray.

Rick turns his upper body to look toward the origin of the familiar voice. “Oh, long time no see thunderthighs, you finally do-” Bell lightly tosses the bun back onto the tray before suddenly wrapping her arms around Rick’s torso and proceeds to german suplex him with a \*gon\*. Grabbing one of his ankles as she rolls back up and tangling it with her right leg while she tucks his second ankle underneath, before dropping back toward the ground in an Indian Deathlock [T/N: This drove me insane as the katakana was ?????????????, which I kept thinking as deathrock. I have no idea why I didn’t think to google the katakana and kept trying to google the english... I blame lack of sleep xP Oh right, Indian Deathlock is a painful submission move that stretches your calf and shin, there are a variety way of doing it apparently]

---

\*guwa\*

Rick, after losing his breath from the suplex, screams in pain as he flails his arms. After a few seconds, Bell releases her hold, gets up and proceeds to munch on the bun. The instructors, Sekn, Echo and the mounted demihumans can only stare at the sudden scene created by the felinoid in shocked silence as the blond youth continues to twitch on the ground and moan in pain.

Looking around her with another snack in her mouth, “vwat? uyu one ah beu uf mu tu?” [What? You want a piece of me too?] The demihumans shake their heads, seeing that, the instructors pretend they saw nothing and resume what they were doing.

Before the commotion can die down, a group of riders approaches from the only road into the Academy. At the same time, Till appears from the workshop area with a set of loose-fitting beige shirt and dark brown trousers while carrying a bag in front and another bag piled on top of her backpack. Next to her is a gray fox, with a small saddlebag strapped extremely close to its body, and Dosnak, carrying even more bags.

After what seems like a long time, the group of four is finally together again.

“Eh, what’s Rick-ni doing on the ground~?”

“Just leave him there. Ahhhhhh, I really miss having something aside from the same crap in the canteen.” Bell casually grabs another snack and pours herself a cup of tea using Rick’s cup.

“Damn it, Bell. I’m not a stress ball you know.” Rick painfully gets up off the ground, flexing his legs to try and shake off the pain. “So what

have you all been up to?"

Kun and his group dismount from a deflated Sammy, with Hank leading the six instructors toward the gathered group. Two of the six required some assistance to walk, but no one seems to mind. Stablehands are already leading the 4 horses away while Sammy remains flat on the ground. The new arrivals give everyone a quick greeting before giving the blond youth a reply. "Eh, been trying to get this up and going." Kun sweeps his left arm toward the group of people on the other side of the field.

"Work, work, work. Stupid people getting injured made me work overtime." Bell takes a whiff of the tea in the cup before drinking it slowly before releasing a satisfied \*aaaaahhh\*.

"Been busy learning how to take over the world~" Till replies nonchalantly while putting the bags on the ground next to Sammy, with Dosnak's help. "So are we ready to go? I wonder why Rick-ni's quest is so weird~" She starts poking in the air, sharing the quest with both Bell and Kun.

"Eh? Right now? But I haven't eaten enough yet." Bell reaches for yet another piece of snack on the tray.

"Damn pig, always thinking of food." Rick retorts while making his way away from the feline by hiding behind Till.

"Well, I'm good, are we good on supplies?"

"Don't worry Kun-sensei, we packed all the essential items already, as well as rations and tools." The gelatinous humanoid affirms while rearranging the bags. "Fliers from the 'Messenger' class and 'Evasion' class will also be joining us, for both escort and training." His entire

body wobble every now and then as he speaks, losing his humanoid form a few times. Gui is kneading at Dosnak's foot from below, seemingly finding it fascinating. This draws some curious glances from the other side of the field before a sharp shout from a scarred, burly dwarf regains the instructors' attention.

"Oh, is Gui going to be coming with us?"

"Why not~? Also, look at this cute body pack Dosnak and those uncles helped to make~"

Kun gives a shrug, "Remember not to cause too much trouble Gui, treat this like when we go hunting, okay?"

"Okay, brother."

The group bid their farewells to the demihumans and wave their good-byes to the instructors after Kun gave Hank some instructions. It took a little longer as Gui started panicking when Sammy starts rising up after being mounted, and to the laughter of everyone, Kun has to spend some time to convince Gui that staying inside Sammy is fine as well. Dosnak travelling inside of Sammy helped with the situation, since he's weak to sunlight in the first place. After a few hiccups, the group finally starts making their way north through the [Forest of Illusions], ignoring the road to the south completely.

\* \* \* \* \*

After exiting the [Forest of Illusions] by following the morning sun, the group crossed the cold river fed by the melted ice caps from the nearby mountains and reached the trading route used by merchants

travelling from the **Feian Plains**. The group used this time to catch up and chat within a chatroom, with Bell snacking frequently. Aside from Kun, everyone was entertained by Gui due to the way it talks and its train of thoughts - of course, no one but Kun knows who Gui really is. With Till's help controlling the wind and Sammy's somewhat unique mode of motion that can ignore terrain, the group travels at a speed that would be envied by all traders. By early-afternoon, they managed to reach the borders of **Lilyhelm**.

"Okay, let's set up camp a little further away from the road and away from the swamps." Kun directs the white furry blob of a mount slightly to the west.

"Why away from the swamps?" The totally relaxed blond youth asked while still on his back.

"You get sick easily if you camp near the swamps, also it's more dangerous in general since creatures from above and below can appear out of the blue."

"Oh~ We should tell that to the kids later~"

"Ah, right..." Kun scratches his cheek uncomfortably, he actually forgot that he's also supposed to be teaching the students. "Anyhow, let's set up camp and hunt a bit before heading into town."

"Oh! Hunt! Hunt! Let's cook some rabbits!"

Rick gets up and looks at the fiery looking felinoid, and thinking better of it, decides to change his comment. "You and Bell will get along really well, Gui."

"Yep."

“Mmhmm~”

The aquamarine haired girl and the black-haired young man both nod in affirmation while agreeing.

Shortly after, Kun found a suitable spot for a campsite and closed the chatroom. Giving the students in the air a signal that this is where they will stop, he points at the general area of the future campsite. Till leaps off Sammy from the side before walking to the front of it. Without needing a command, the white blob opens up its “mouth”, revealing its fleshy interior. With a texture like that of satin and a softness like that of a partially inflated balloon, the interior space is actually pretty comfortable. The total space seen is just enough for a few people, in the back of the space, there’s a seal, blocking this “interior room” from the rest of its body.

The gray fox dashes out while looking around and sniffing the air with its nose slightly elevated. Dosnak takes up his usual humanoid shape, from the semi-spherical shape that he was in before, and starts carrying out some of the luggage that took up most of the space. The rest of the party appears behind Till and starts to help out with the luggage. The students form an assembly line to quickly relay the luggage to the campsite.

The **Norman Kingdom**, also known as the **Kingdom of Earth and Water** by the locals, it prizes itself as the **Food Garden** [T/N: ? ???????, I think this might of meant “breadbasket”] of the eastern region of the **Zrewheig** continent. Due to its lush wetlands, warm climate, and immense variety of food products from its plants and animals, this title is well respected amongst the gourmands of the Noble houses everywhere. Many of its products can found throughout the eastern part of the continent, its various tender meats, freshwater fish, sweet, succulent fruits, and array of seasonal vegetables are often



traded with its neighbours for goods that it lacks within its border, namely metal goods, salt, cheese, cereal grains, and so forth.

The pieces of luggage are piled neatly onto the ground before being sorted. The students grab their respective tools, weapons and armours while the 4 members from the party of 5 grab their gear as well.

“Oh, right.” Kun gestures to all the students to gather around. “When choosing a campsite, always camp in a dry location and away from swamps if possible. Today’s training is simple, ‘Messengers’ students will be responsible for making shelters, take the environment into account, ‘Evasion’ students will need to forage enough food for everybody, it has to be from the trees though. Understand?”

“““Yes, Kun-sensei”””

“You want to join us, Dosnak~?”

“Nono, it’s okay Till-ne, I’ll just keep an eye on the younger ones. I will do some training of my own while I guard the place with Sammy.”

\*kero kero\*

The furry blob croaks happily while bobbing up and down in place.

“Alright, the fort’s all yours!” Rick gives him a thumb up before shouting. “When we are not here, listen to Dosnak!”

“““Yes, Rick-sensei!”””

“Alright, let’s get this GOING!” The fiery looking felinoid pushes her arms over head before pulling her elbows back and away, giving herself a stretch with a \*hyoi\* before she starts running toward the

swamp.

“Hunt, hunt, hunt, hunt!” Gui bolts after her while repeating his word like a mantra.

“Wait up!”

\* \* \* \* \*

\*sasan\* \*Nyahahahahaha\*

A shadow dodges to the side while a silvery flash, tinged with a faint red aura, slashes down on the neck of a charging TriTusk Golden Boar, [T/N: ???] before the sound of a halberd cutting is heard. Immediately following that is an evil, high pitched laughter that is suitable for an evil overlord as the boar falls down on the ground with a \*dote\*. The TriTusk Golden Boar is a relatively small creature with a height of no more than half a meter, it has two large protruding tusks that are comparable to a third of its approximately one meter long body on the side of its mouth and a slightly shorter horn on its forehead that resembles a tusk. Its fur is gold in colour, with short, thick hair that's both smooth and oily, covering its thick -compared to its height- muscular body, likely an adaptation to suit this muddy and wet environment.

Due to its short and robust stature, Bell had determined a cut slightly off-center on its neck would be the best option for her since the first fight. Trying to aim for its short, stubby leg would be futile and it's too awkward for her to strike at the boar in its face with her halberd. After defeating a few of these beast, she got careless and ended up getting cut once on her left leg. As a result, she went into a slight rampage,

forgoing accuracy for brute strength. The corpse of the now dead boar is still bleeding from the multiple large, deep cuts along its neck.

“Geez, take it easy, Bell. Just look at those two.” Rick points to the Gui and Kun combo that’s taking down one boar after another.

After nearly getting gouged by one of the boars, Gui’s excitement calmed down as Kun started giving out orders. Gui would harass and taunt the boar from the front while moving side to side. Although the boar has amazing charging speed, it cannot maintain that speed while turning, thus Gui could literally run circles around it. After Gui moved sharply to the side, completely drawing the attention of the boar. Kun -who is wielding a sword and rod combo- would then suddenly rush forward as the boar turns and thrust the sword into its eye, straight into the brain, killing it cleanly within one hit before backing away. It is a game of patience as Kun has to wait for the perfect opportunity to attack and has to wait for the beast’s death-throes to end before retrieving his sword. Nevertheless, it’s an extremely safe method and the kill is extremely clean as it doesn’t damage the boar’s body.

“Pffft, this is just stress relief! Come! Bring the next one!”

“7 isn’t enough? Tsk, fine. See anything up there, Till?” The youth looks up at the figure that’s bobbing up and down in the air.

“Hmm... There~ 10 o’clock, about 50 meters~” The girl is busy holding back her hair with one hand while pointing in a certain direction. Unlike while sending herself forward, descending, and ascending in the air, her long hair is getting in her way as she tries to “float”. This is due to the fact that she doesn’t actually have the ability to fly, just that her control of Wind [Spell]s is at the level that she can roughly control how one can become airborne. [T/N: This one is a bit confusing, I THINK “ability to fly” is referring to the traditional methods of flying,

like with birds, regular airplanes or perhaps spells in RPG that gives you the ability to fly-at-will]

“Gah...” The youth slowly makes his way over the swampy forest’s undergrowth.

“Okay, I think we are good for now.” Kun grabs a rag from one of his bags and wipes his sword clean. “My sense of battle is mostly back to normal.” He starts rolling his shoulders to loosen them up.

“Alrig-” Bell stops mid-sentence as she turns around to answer him. She has been occupied with her own battles, thus never noticed the ever growing pile of corpses. “Damn it, you two, holy shit.” The feline gives her head a shake in disbelief. “Alright, just let me finish this one.”

“Help Till and stay on guard, Gui.”

“Okay, brother.” The gray fox moves himself over to the girl, who had returned to the ground and is now giving him a quick rub on his back, before sitting down, drooling ever so slightly in anticipation - as this situation usually means that Kun will be making food shortly. The young man walks toward the wooden rack that he has left on the side and retrieves some tools before skinning and gutting the corpses.

“«Aimed Shot»!”

\*PYU\* \*Kuhiiii\*

The sound of an arrow piercing through the air is then followed by a painful squeal.

\*bachan\*

A single splash travels from slightly over 20 meters away. “Shit! Guys, a little help?!” The returning blond youth is calling for help as he tries to get out of the muddy puddle after he took a misstep.

\*pichan pichan pichan\*

“Eh, hurry please! That hog is coming in fast!”

\*pichan pichan pichan\* \*kuhihi\*

The beast is merely a stone throw away now due to its extremely fast charge.

“«Rising Tempest»~” Before the boar can reach Rick, he’s sent airborne onto a nearby tree branch, out of harm’s way. [ED Note: Before the boar can Rickroll: brought to you courtesy of sumguy grammas]

“Here piggy piggy, come to mama.” With its target gone, the charging boar changes its target to the next thing standing before it, which happens to be Bell. Since this will be their last fight here, she intends to go all out. The purpose of this hunt is merely to get both herself and Kun their battle-sense back. Showing a menacing smile, she lowers her center of gravity.

\*KUUHiihhIII\*

“«Heavy Strike»”

The boar squeals angrily at the same time as Bell unleashes her «Skill».

\*KAN\* \*buta\*

The halberd unexpectedly bounces off the horn of the beast as it gets slammed into the mushy ground.

“Damn... Then take this! «Bash»! «Bash»! «Bash»! «Bash»! «Bash»!”

After repeatedly striking the skull of the boar, its entire body is now buried within the ground. The beast struggles frantically with muffled \*kuhi\*, trying to free its buried limbs.

\*Nyahahahahahahaha\*

“Not so tough now, are you?! «Heavy Strike»!”

\*zashi\*

The halberd strikes perfectly along the neck of the boar, barely missing the spine. Blood squirts out from the wound as it continues to struggle in the ground before going completely still.

“Whew, mmuuuuuuuuuccchhh better.” The felinoid looks down at her handiwork in satisfaction, before frowning. “Ah crap.” Stabbing the top of her halberd next to the boar’s corpse, she tries to dig it out of the ground.

“Um... Kun, a little help?”

“Hmm...? I’m a little busy right now. Why can’t you get down? Till, mind giving Rick a hand?”

“Wait!”

“Sure~”

“What’s the matter Rick-ni... EEEEEK!”

Both Kun and Bell drops what they were doing and rush toward Till with their weapons in hand, Gui follows them while tilting his head, as that scream isn't a scream that means danger.

“God damn it...”

\*hahahahahahahahaha\*

Laughter fills the air after the two see Rick sitting on a thick tree branch, using a twig to cover his nearly naked bottom. Till is covering her eyes with her hand and walking back, using Gui as a guide. Rick on the other hand is blushing all the way to his ears. His pants and shoes are still stuck within the puddle where he fell.

...

\*MMMMmmmmmmmm\*

\*Mmmmmmmmmmm\*

\*MMmmmmmmmmmm\*

\*gefu\*

\*fuuu\*

The five of them are laying lazily on a dry, grassy area next to a doused campfire with the sun barely shining on them in this clearing - all of them share a satisfied expression. Since there were so many boars neatly killed without using any «Skill»s or «Spell»s, Kun was able to dissect them more thoroughly as more than half of the corpses didn't scatters into particles of light on their own. Out of the 22 boars, 12 of them didn't degrade at all. From those 12, high quality fur, meat, and internal organs were extracted.

Internal organs, like with blood, spoils quickly after the body dies, so

it's customary for hunters to eat them as soon as possible - and Kun is no exception. After inspecting the livers, Kun deems 9 of them to be edible. After thinly cutting them, Rick is asked to freeze them with «Ice Shell» briefly before cooking them over the fire on a skillet. For the hearts, he skewers them with branches and lines them up around the fire to roast them. Aside from Till who dislikes both organs due to their texture and flavour, the party ate heartily. To accommodate Till, Kun prepared some ribs and pork belly for her. Considering that the party consists of gluttons of one degree or another, additional portions had to be made after each of them took samples from Till's share. Thus ending with the result of the entire party laying back for about an hour while they digest their food.

\*kunka kunka\*

All of the sudden, Gui stands up and sniffs the air sharply, inadvertently pushing away Till who was using him as a pillow. "Brother, bad people are coming, and prey, lots and lots of prey." The gray fox bares his fang as he stares fixedly in one direction.



# Tall trees are vulnerable to gale

[T/N: Title is ??????? which is a japanese idiom, I asked around and tried using english idioms like “The bigger you are, the harder you fall” and “Tall trees are the first to shatter in a storm”, but they don’t exactly match the original idiom, hence the stupid sounding title. It means something along the line of “standing out will make one weak”, the title is referenced both literally and metaphorically in this chapter]

In a smooth, unhurried motion, Kun climbs up a nearby tree with his external frame that his packs are secured to and sets it on a branch. Gui runs under the tree and lifts up one of his hind legs.

[T/N: Since the peddler’s rack translation doesn’t do it justice, it’s one of the seatless frames thing they used in various parts of china, korea and japan in the past. They look [like this](#) and is made out of bamboo or other wood]

\*mugi\*

The gray fox releases a confused whine.

[T/N: Do I need to explain this part to you guys?]

“Don’t worry about it, I’ll leave a mark. Prepare an ambush! You guys

get ready too!”

\*kaka kaka\*

In a flash, Gui disappears up another tree with the sound of wood being lightly scratched. The other three look at the graceful blur, completely in awe.

“How the hell is he that fast with an animal avatar?”

“Worry about that later, shut up and get ready!” Bell dashes by with her reply and with a \*pa\* makes a big leap onto a large tree branch in another location with her halberd drawn and extended.

\*hyun\*

A gust of wind appears suddenly behind Rick, ending with a mass of aquamarine hair on another tree branch.

“Need a hand, Rick-ni~? I’ll promise to keep your pants on~”

“What?! No! I can do it!” Finding another tree in a different direction surrounding the clearing, Rick jumps up at a large tree and with a \*shin\*, grips onto its trunk with hands that freeze over on contact. With the continuous sound of ice shattering and forming, he quickly makes his way up to a branch as well.

The group is now partially surrounding the clearing, forming a rough semi-circle.

“What’s going on, Kun?” Bell looks at Kun’s figure sitting on another tree’s branch, with her right hand on her ear.

“Remember that scholar that joined us?”

“Yeah, what about him?”

“The village he was staying at got attacked by a horde of Huntsmen Rabbits and a group of players.”

“And? ... wait, you don’t mean...”

“Yep.”

“What the hell is wrong with these people?!” \*shhhiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii\* The angry hissing sound can be heard by everyone that’s sitting on the various tree branches. “They are going to pay for ruining my nap!”

“Rick was right, you and Gui will definitely get along.” The young man recalls Gui’s grumpiness when a greenhorn accidentally woke Gui up not too long ago.

“What was that?”

“Eh, nothing, share the info with Till and decide on a plan of action, I’ll do the same with Rick.”

After relaying the information to Till and Rick followed by a short discussion, the group agrees to just kill the users and deal with the monsters somehow. If all else fails, Till would go into the air and wait until the monsters leave to pick up any items that drop from their deaths.

\*sha sha\*

“Brother, this is bad, it’s the long prey that’s coming.” The gray fox appears on a higher branch above Kun after the rustling of some

branches and leaves.

“Long prey?”

“The ones that killed one of our sky-thief that can’t fly.”

“Oh, snake?”

“Snack?”

[T/N: Snake? Snake? SNNNAAAkkKEEE!!!! Couldn’t resist, sorry.

Onto the actual note, Kun asked Gui “??, ??” which is pronounced as “aa, hebi(??)? - Oh, snake?”, Gui isn’t sure of the word, ended up asking “???” -the hiragana is used to denote that Gui is childish/bad with words, a continuation of the trend from the Gui chapters, everything Gui says is pretty much hira \*sobs\*- which is pronounced “ebi? - Shrimp?”. Since the sound wordplay fails to translate, I chose snack... cause I can swear Gui is more pig than fox, thus the pun is kinda preserved while keeping it within Gui’s character. I actually thought that (??) was a typo until I realized the pun like 5 minutes later. Eh... let me know if I shouldn't mention stuff like this, since it's boring to most people :P anyways]

“It is ‘S-N-A-K-E’, got it? Alright, good work, then just focus on the bad people and stay away from the long prey, okay?”

“Yes, brother!”

\*sha sha\*

The gray fox disappears from sight after walking to the end of his

branch and jumping over to another tree.

“Rick, we are dealing with snakes.” Although he’s unable to see the party, Kun looks toward the tree that Rick’s hiding on with his right hand to his ear.

“Snakes?” Rick scrunches his eyebrows. “Since we’re near the Norman Kingdom, they are probably the level 62-68 territorial Marsh Vipers (???) and non-aggressive Emerald Pythons (???).”

“You can’t normally train those though...”

[T/N: Referring to gathering the monsters ala MMO term]

“No idea, but that’s what I remember from the bestiary.”

“Alright, let the others know.” Dropping his hand, Kun proceeds to secure his pack and sword to the branch. He grabs a piece of rag, he wraps it around the head of the rod before drenching it with a container of tallow. Afterward, he places his hand onto the trunk of the tree, he casts «Flame» for a brief second to leave a scorching black mark accompanied by a burnt smell.

\*GIE\* \*dottaa\*

A man screams out in surprise before crashing into the ground with a gray mass on his back. The elvish looking man lands face first since he was already running when he got jumped on and lost his balance. He tries to look up, but the mass on his back steps on his head before dashing off into the clearing, disappearing into the trees on the other side.

“The hell was that?!”

“Is that one of those jungle cats?”

“Move it! Move it!” A man and another elf helps to drag their fallen comrade off the leaf littered ground and resume running.

“Shit! Use that clearing to gain some ground, these mobs are gaining on us.” A man with a squirming burlap sack on his back shouts at the others. There’s a total of 35 men, all of them are either carrying a sack over their shoulders or armed with bows and arrows. About 10 meters behind them, the damp jungle floor is rustling and weaving as though it’s alive.

\*pasha pasha\*

The men rush into the clearing in a staggered line.

\*guwa\* \*zuzoo\*

One of the men steps into a puddle hidden by the leaf litter and screams. \*dote\* The bag falls onto the soft floor and its content rolls out. Numerous fist sized eggs with green speckles roll out.

“Help!”

“Leave him! Move move move!”

“AAHHHhhhh...”

Within moments, the fallen man is swarmed by numerous three meter long pythons, with broken arrows in their bodies, as they quickly squeeze his limbs and torso in coordination with one another.

\*pyu\* \*pyu\* \*pyu\* \*pyu\*

\*funnn funnn\* \*funnn funnn\*

\*dote\* \*dote\* \*dottaa\* \*dottaa\*

“Arrrrgh!”

“AAAH!”

“Fhu...!”

“...!”

The sounds of arrows and strong gusts of wind rip through the air before sending four men faltering to the ground as a result of the ambush.

“What the hell? Are we under attack?”

“I don’t see anything though!”

“Don’t tell me this place is haunted...”

“This is just a game! Like hell this place is haunted. Keep moving!”

“Leave whoever falls, we need to complete this quest somehow! Mov-”

The man, who was giving out orders since earlier, become silent and clutches his throat in shock. A moment later, he’s sent spiraling into the air toward the direction where they came from.

“WHAT IS HAPPENING?”

“JUST RUN!”

The remaining 29 standing men panic from the unexpected situation of being attacked and losing their leader suddenly. Like a headless dragon, the body becomes chaotic without guidance. Some of the men decide to drop their sacks and run for their lives while draw their

weapons and look at the trees frantically instead.

“Gggggarh...”

“AHH!”

“Eeeeeek?!”

“Heellppp!!”

“Oh my god, oh my god, noooo!”

Screams fill the air as more men clutch at their wounds with hands over them while the ones already on the ground plea uselessly towards the various snakes who either crush them to death or bite them repeatedly with their venomous fangs.

“Archers! Ther-” One of the elven archers spotted where the invisible attacks are coming from, trying to get the others’ attention. Which quickly made him the target of both Rick’s and Till’s attack and quickly eliminated.

\*pyu pyu pyu pyu pyu pyu\*

Six arrows are let loose toward the general direction of where Rick is hiding as the man gets sent flying onto his side.

\*do do do do\*

Four of the arrows lodge themselves into the tree trunk where the youth was a moment ago while the other two fail to reach their mark.

“Ahahahahaaha, what a bunch of morons!” Rick makes a run deeper into the trees with a curved path as he taunts them.

“That son of a bitch, KILL HIM!”



\*WWWAAAAAAAAAAAA\*

About half of the remaining men roar in unison and head into the trees in a straight line toward the direction where their attacker is heading, hoping to cut him off.

“You idiots! He isn’t alone!” A tall, bearded man that has reached the end of the clearing turns back and shouts at his comrades. “Just get outta here! The rest of you, follow me!” The man runs off into the jungle with five others, away from the trees where the ambush was laid and the clearing where the snakes are finishing off his fallen comrades.

Ever since Rick’s cover was blown, he has been intentionally fleeing deeper into the jungle with Bell and Kun somewhat in between the pursuers and himself. Till on the other hand is busy slamming the still panicking people in the clearing, as well as sending the stranglers of the pursuing group into the horde of snakes.

“Good luck, Bell!”

“All yours bro!”

Rick sends two PMs quickly as he continues to run inside the jungle, paying extra attention to the floor to avoid any puddles.

\*NNYYYYYYYYYAAAAAAAAAA\*

\*KAN\*

A loud, cat-like screech echoes throughout the jungle before a massive metallic ring overpowers every other sound in the area, causing all kinds of birds to take flight and flee over the canopy.

“Ah, son of a bitch!” Bell shakes her right hand to get rid of the numbness. She had jumped from the branch and slashed down at one of

Rick's pursuers after receiving his PM. Combining her weight and the force of gravity, it wouldn't be surprising if she had bisected the victim. Who would have known that the man would happen to wear a mithril helm. Unfortunately for the man, the helm only stopped the halberd from cutting through, not the impact itself, which happens to end up focused into his neck, crushing it. The man can only collapse forward with a \*guuku\* gurgle as a result.

"Fuck!"

"What the?!"

"GET HER!"

The men quickly slash their weapons at her.

\*fyu\*

A dagger flies directly towards Bell's face, who drops to one knee to evade it. One against many is usually disadvantageous, the problem is, this isn't like usual. The pursuers didn't surround the target, the target ambushed the pursuers! This means that the ambusher has the advantage of surprise and favourable terrain! Revealing a menacing grin, the felinoid leaps up toward a tree branch before jumping from one branch to the next.

\*sha sha sha\*

\*NYAHAHAHAHAhahahahaha\*

The rustling of the trees is completely overpowered by her taunting laughter which fills the air momentarily before fading slowly.

"Gather around... it's too dangerous to be alone!"

"What the hell man, what the hell, I didn't sign up for this!"

“I think we should just leave the guild afterward man, shit! First we lost everything in the war against the [Monochrome Blades] and now this! This god damn guild is cursed!”

“Wait, where’s Frederick?”

“Shit, Bernhard and Torsten are gone as well.”

The men put their backs against each other’s and start looking around, with their [Villain] symbols above their heads overlapping one another. The group that was formed to chase the archer in the tree has shrunk by more than half! This was of course done by Till, who picked off one pursuer after another, sending them into the snakes whenever she had the chance. Using a combination of «Air Hammer» into their mouth to silence them and a modified two-fold «Air Lance» to send them flying, she was able to pick them off like turkeys and send them to reptilian hell. Using cover and the near invisible spells of the «Wind» element, the so called weakest of the weak elements is proving its effectiveness!

The snakes have finished off everyone in the clearing and are moving in their direction, there are only two groups left, the hunters who became the hunted and the group that ran away. Seeing that there’s no one else left to pick off, Till sends bursts of wind into the canopy above the men.

\*sha sha sha sha\*

The rustling causes the gathered group of men to go stiff and to back away unconsciously as they stare at the tree branches with unease.

\*siiiii\* \*siii\* \*fiiii\*

The distracted group of men finally notice the approaching hissing snakes right at their feet.

“Shit, shit, shit, shit!” One of the men breaks into a run, leaving his companions behind.

“Wait!”

\*zubon\*

The runner manages to get about 5 meters before a shadow falls from above, whacking him in the head with a rod. The ambushed man is stabbed repeatedly with the bottom end of the rod as Kun didn't bring another weapon down with him. The wrapped rag softened the blows somewhat, but the impact was still able to stun the man. The man quickly becomes unable to fight back as Kun alternates strikes between the head and the genitals, completely destroying the man's manhood and spirit.

“Another one?”

“Just how many of them are there?!”

“Grrr...!”

The men are gnashing their teeth, busy fending off the large pythons with green, geometric patterns and the thin, slender brown vipers as they slowly retreat. Running off would mean they will be picked off by an ambush, their only chance is to somehow conserve their strength and fight their way out!

“Kun! Behind you!”

\*pyu\*

The sound of arrow pierces the air as Kun drops and rolls forward in one motion.

\*ssiiiiiii\*

The Marsh Viper hisses as it twists its body in the air, dodging the invisible arrow, completely missing Kun with its leaping surprise attack.

“«Flame»!” The young man, with leaves stuck to his clothing, gives a thumbs up before placing his right hand above the rod, setting it aflame.

\*SSiiiiiiiiiiiiii\*

The snake starts hissing and swaying uneasily at the appearance of the flame.

“Be glad I don’t have any realgar or sulphur with me!” The black-haired young man waves the burning rod left and right in front of the viper, causing it to retreat with its body swaying, ready to strike if given the chance.

\*Nyahahahahahaha\*

A fiery red blur drops from the trees once more. Her halberd accelerating from the back of her heels, over her head, all the way to the front, her arched back springing forward forming a ? with her legs spread apart, completing a full revolution.

**\*sasan\***

The blade of her halberd cuts deeply into a man's chest, three inches deep, completely cleaving through his leather cuirass and his sternum. Using the entrenched halberd as a pole, the felinoid somersaults over the halberd before swinging it upward, dislodging it from the man's

chest. The man's corpse falls backward, completely destroying the men's formation.

The jungle floor is now a free-for-all battleground between five men, a felinoid, and a horde of snakes. In the periphery, there's the 1 vs 1 between Kun and a viper while Rick and Till act as support.

"Who the hell are you?! Why are you after us?!"

"Let me guess, 'don't you know who are?' Geez, Rick is right, you people are just born villains."

[T/N: I think she's referring to v1c9 when Rick was enforcing the quarantine against the fake epidemic]

\*hyuuu\*

"What did you just s-" Before the man completes his sentence, Bell's halberd cuts through the air, causing the man to dodge into his companions.

\*zubari\*

A python to the right of the felinoid has its head flipped backward, attached only by its skin, its body squirming chaotically on the ground.

"I said you guys are born villains, [Dawn's Moonlight] scum."

"[Monochrome Blades]?! Waaaaa!" The man charges at Bell with his sword raised.

"Don't group me with those pieces of trash!"

\*kan kan kan kan kan kan kan kan kan\*

The whirling blade of her halberd dances with a crimson aura, repeatedly striking against the man's sword. Seeing their chance, his comrades try to land some sneak attacks, but were all struck by the halberd, causing sparks to fly left and right.

\*ssiiiiiiiiiiii\* \*ffiiiiiiii\*

The snakes have them surrounded, but keep a safe distance from the fiery blur in their midst, their instincts telling them to stay away.

"Ahhhh!" A viper leaps into the air and bites a man's neck from behind, causing him to scream.

"Shit!" Another man spins around and swings his sword with an upward trajectory.

\*ssssiiiiiiiiiiiiiiii\*

The viper hisses and waves its body in midair, twisting out of the way of the sword.

"Please... antidote...!" The bitten man puts his hand over the wound as his neck starts swelling and is gradually turning purple.

Taking this opening, Bell spins around while releasing one hand from the halberd and lightly grasping it with the other, letting the halberd slip outwards with the centrifugal force, extending her reach.

\*zan\*

The halberd strikes the man in the side of the head, cutting through his cheekbone, causing blood to splatter on his comrade that tried to save him.

\*fiiiiii\*

\*pyu pyu pyu pyu\*

\*kon\*

A python stands up with its body and snaps down towards the felinoid's exposed back. Before it can reach her, its head is rattled from some mass striking from the side while its body is spewing out blood from four different piercing wounds.

"Look, we surrender! Just don't kill us, okay? Help us deal with these snakes or you won't be able to get away as well!"

"Did you give mercy to people at that village on the Feian plains?" The colour drains from the men's face. It was one of their more successful quests, but it was cruel and mercilessly done. They don't know how she knows, but she knows!

"We can pay your group quest's divine retribution, your quest's reward and even a little extra, so why don't we work together? I mean, those villagers were just NPCs anyways, not like they matter." One of the other men tries to deduce the situation and take advantage of the other party's greed and human empathy. It's logical that a bounty would be set on them if their deed were uncovered. By removing the opposing party's incentive to fight while appealing to their human nature, it should in theory stop them from attacking, as the reward is there without the risk.

"And you are just scum." Bell gives them a smile that doesn't reach her



eyes while she pivots her halberd left and right, keeping her eyes on the snakes and the men.

The men give each other a meaningful look.

\*waaaaaaa\*

\*ssssiiiiiii\*

\*fiiiiiiiiiii\*

The men all attack Bell at the same time, the snakes -sensing the attack- join in to take down their biggest threat.

“Shit! «Rapidfire»!”

\*pyu pyu pyu pyu\*

“Get down~ Bell-ne~! «Downburst»”

\*panpan\* \*shhhaa shaaaa shaaa\*

The formless arrows pierce two men in their charge all of the sudden. At the same time, a clap is heard from above followed by violent shaking of the trees, with branches and twigs snapping off left and right. A heavy weight appears to push down on everything in a 5 meter radius around Bell, who flattened herself against the ground. It's the same spell that was used when they fought against that pack of wolves in the hills! Although the force is slightly weaker as compared to then since the trees are blocking parts of it, it still manages to slam all the snakes and men into the ground. The damage, like with all «Wind Spells» is minuscule, but the «Spell»'s usefulness lies in its effects!

“NNNNNyyyyyYYYAAAAA!” The felinoid is the first to recover since she was ready for the impact, taking this opening, she leaps off the floor while on all fours, “«Heavy Strike»! «Heavy Strike»! «Heavy Strike»! «Heavy Strike»!”, cleaving the still stunned snakes into mincemeat.

\*pyu pyu pyu pyu\*

Rick likewise starts pouring on the long range attacks, “«Rapidfire»!”, pinning the men down. The manabow’s damage is weak, but it doesn’t matter since he doesn’t need to be able to kill.

\*KOKI\*

A loud sound of bone cracking is heard from Kun’s direction.

“AH?! AHH!” One of the men on the floor screams, completely surprised at the sudden pain in his buttocks. His surviving comrades turn to look at him while trying to get up.

“What the fuck?!”

A bodiless viper’s head is firmly attached to the screaming man’s right buttcheek. One of the men nearly passed out from the unexpected sight.

“Holy shit, Kun, the hell did you do to that snake?”

In Kun’s left hand is the improvised torch, in his right hand is a meter long viper without its head, blood dripping out where its head once was.

“Apparently these vipers really are no different from the snakes I had

to deal with for my chicken coop.”

“And that is...?”

“You just grab them by the tail, swing them around and,” Kun makes a slow snapping motion with his right hand, “crack it like a whip.”

[T/N: By the way, this is [real apparently](#), I was WTFing when I was translating this part]

The men’s expression went from pale to ghost white. Facing the felinoid who was able to fend them off was scary enough, now there appears someone who literally kills a monster in the mid-60s with his bare hands. The standing men simply drop to their knees, completely losing their will to fight and opt to log out rather than suffer the inevitable. The snakes, sensing their chance, pounce on the now lifeless bodies.

“I know you run a military training center and all that Kun... but what’s up with all your crazy techniques? I mean dual wielding is one thing... but killing snakes too?” Rick shakes his head in disbelief, this friend through chance is making him feel like his reality is a joke.

The young man shrugs, “Just something I picked up.”

“You... don’t just pick up things...” The youth takes a deep breath before releasing a long \*fuuuuu\* Snapping his head up from his sigh “Shit, not good. «Rapidfire»!”

Bell is slowly being overwhelmed by the snake horde. Since everyone else is out of range, they all start focusing on the felinoid. Till is of course helping her, but since «Wind Spells» don’t produce much

damage, the only thing she can do is help keep the snakes at bay.

\*pyu pyu pyu pyu\*

The formless arrows fly through the air and head toward the vipers, coiled up, ready to pounce. As though the Marsh Vipers can see them clearly, they agilely jump out of the way.

[ED NOTE: VIPERS SEE HEAT, FEEL BAD FOR YOUR  
UPBRINGING IF YOU DON'T KNOW THIS. T/N: I'm not the  
meanie this time :P]

“Focus on the pythons! I'll help Bell!”

“Got it!”

Kun makes a beeline towards Bell, making sure to avoid the puddles that are riddled on the jungle floor.

“Nya! NyanyaNYAAA!”

\*hyuhhaa\*

Bell spins with her halberd almost non-stop, while doing so, she struggles to breathe. If she slows down for too long, the snakes would definitely overpower her. Numerous scratches appears on her limbs, it's just by sheer luck that the vipers never managed to sink their fangs into her.

“«Fireball»!” A ball of fire flies past Bell, causing a part of the snake horde to disperse. “Bell, use fire!” Kun appears next to her with only a blazing rod in hand.

“«Flaming Edge»!” The snake horde backs away from the two as soon as another source of fire pops up.

“Catch your breath, then deal with the pythons, I’ll get the vipers.”

\*hyuhhaa\*

Bell continues to breathe heavily, merely nodding her head.

Suddenly, Kun runs forward to the nearest viper with his burning rod in front of him.

\*siiiii\*

The vipers jump out of the way as they become blinded by the burning flame.

\*kyuu\*

Thrusting out his right hand suddenly, Kun grabs onto one of the viper’s tails tightly.

\*byun byun byun\*

He spins the viper like a cowboy twirling a lasso above his head, causing even Bell to watch him out of the corner of her eyes.

\*KOKI\*

Without warning, he swings the snake forward before snapping it back, using it as though it’s a whip. A loud pop is heard as the snake in his hand goes limp, blood dripping onto the floor from where its head

once was.

Bell raises an eyebrow, “Pass me that please.”

The young man tosses the snake carcass casually to the felinoid before moving with sudden motions toward the crowd of snakes, which is now extremely cautious.

\*guku\*

Hanging the headless snake above her mouth, Bell proceeds to drink the snake's blood.  
 “NYYYYYAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAHHHH! Damn, wish I had some wine! Let's do this!”

...

...

...

The snake horde shrinks rapidly as they kill the snakes one after another, Kun focuses on the vipers while Bell focuses on the pythons. Rick and Till provide support in thwarting any snake attacks. With the fire on their weapons and the support from afar, the snakes couldn't even scratch them.

As the horde is about to be routed...

“Ahhhhhhh!” A stream of aquamarine falls from the trees, landing on the ground with a \*dottaa\*

# Side Story 2

## Side Story

“Honey...”

“Yes, darling?”

A petite woman in her early 20s with long black hair coquettishly drapes her slender arms around a man, just a tad bigger than herself with a loose spiky hairstyle - whom is sitting in an office chair, leaning her weight gently onto his shoulders.

The woman continues to lean onto the man silently, putting her head on his left shoulder. The man furrows his eyebrows at the strange action of his wife, stops his work and place his hands on hers.

“What’s the matter, XinXin?”

The man nestles his head against the woman’s.

Xin bites her lower lips nervously before replying. “The doctor said I’m pregnant.”

The man’s face goes blank for a few moments. “Are you serious?!” Excitement fills his voice as he gently kneads the woman’s hand. He quickly gets up from the chair and guides her to sit down. “Umm... okay! You should stop working... work... right! We are going to need to hire a maid! And a nurse! I’ll see if I can get a doctor to be on call, I know a friend that might be willing to help out. Oh! A nutritionist as wel-”

The woman gently places her hand on the man's mouth to interrupt his excited rambling. "The doctor said I can keep working until the end of the second trimester."

"But-"

"No buts, I'd be bored to death if I all I do is eat and sleep. And we don't need to waste money on these other things, save it for the baby, okay?"

The man gets up and starts pacing excitedly. "We need to take precautions though! I mean, this is a miracle!"

Indeed, he had been diagnosed as impotent by doctors due to an unrelated accident when he was a child. In a society where leaving behind descendants is part of one's filial piety, it was a great shock to both himself and his family. It was due to this fact that he worked relentlessly to better himself, even if he can't contribute to the family bloodline, he can still contribute academically and financially. With this spirit forged through despair and hard-work, he gained the title "Millennial Genius" from society at large, ignorant of his circumstances.

[T/N: ???????? is actually "One in a thousand year genius", but that's a mouthful, hence Millennial Genius].

The man finally stops pacing and gently places his hand on the woman's belly before giving her a kiss on the cheek. Both of them are smiling warmly as they continue to make plans for the future.

\* \* \* \* \*



\*pi\*

\*pi\*

A tired looking man paces outside the Intensive Care Unit entrance accompanied by the rhythmical beeps of various large, unwieldy machines.

\*sha\*

A dignified looking doctor, with gray streaks in his hair, exits from the large double door, the soft rubber paddings scraping along the floor.

“Sensei, how is she?”

[T/N: Doctors are also addressed as sensei in japanese, although there's another reason why I opted to keep it]

\*fuuuu\*

The doctor sighs dejectedly. “Miss Xin is fine... but, as for your daughter...”

“But, *what?!*” The man grabs the doctor by his shoulders in a vice-like grip.

“We think it might have been Erythroblastosis Fetalis... we also see some signs of Uveitis, we would like to keep her for observation.”

[T/N: ?????? and ?????? respectively, it should be correct since it's "common enough" to have a quick GT for it, correct me if I'm wrong~].

"Erythro... what?"

"It's when the antibodies from the mother attacks the fetus... it's already surprising that she didn't have a miscarriage. Uveitis is an illness of the eye, if she survives, it's very likely she will be blind."

"Please Sensei, save her..." The man drops to his knees, his hand falling off the doctor's shoulder onto the floor, tears streaking down his face.

\* \* \* \* \*

"Maaaaama, wuuuu!" A small babe calls out as she practices her speech in her mother's arm, her small hands reaching into the air as a gust of wind rolls by. The family of three is slowly strolling through a path within a vibrant forest filled with vivid green and soft, pastel-esque colours dotting the fruits and flowers.

"Are you feeling better, Nyoko?" The father grabs her little hands and gives them a kiss before running his hand through her curly, silky hair.

[T/N: Her name is ??, which can be either Yukiko or Nyoko, I vaguely remember there's something to do with Nyoko in the future chapters, but I can't really remember. I might change it to Yukiko in the future if I remember the wordplay wrong since Yukiko also have alternate meanings.

"Daaaaada, bluuuuu!"

“Call me that one more time, Nyoko.” The man leans in and rubs his nose on his daughter’s before giving his wife a quick kiss.

\*bacha\*

Bird poop splats onto the ground where the man was merely a moment ago.

“Bluuuuuby!” The child squeezes her face slightly before smiling again, reaching into the air.

“Ken, are you sure about this?”

“There’s no other way... bringing her to the forests, fields and the sea helped slow it down, but it seems her body has adapted. She already lost her eyes... I can’t have our child suffer like this.”

“There has to be another way...”

“I wish there were Xin Xin, but we don’t even know what disease this is... her immune system is so strong and unrestrained that it’s literally attacking her body from the inside, all her fevers aren’t even caused by infections. Sensei is already at a loss... we think it could be Lupus Erythematosus [??????????] and are working toward that area... but we really don’t know...” The man looks helplessly into the trees.

“But... how long will you be gone?”

“I don’t know... I will unlock that device somehow, I’ll send all the information I can to some friends at Leviathan Medical Laboratories. They will somehow help you, so wait for my news there.”

The man gives both his wife and daughter each a long kiss on the

forehead as they enjoy their last outing together as a family before he heads off to the Leviathan Conglomerate Headquarters across the Kelantan Strait to the east.

\* \* \* \* \*

“-atholiths are ... locations for ... permanent sites.”

“Offsh-... expensive for... -cinity”

Indistinct chattering can be heard from the quiet little room haphazardly filled with dolls and toys that are completely mismatched with the large, inactive machineries as well as the array of filing cabinets. Soft, thin curtains are closed where the windows are, letting diffused sunlight fill the room.

“Baaa-ffffuuu-oooo-libbbffff.”

A young child tilts her head as she steadies herself in the cradle.

\*sha\*

“Hello, Nyoko. Just here to pick something up.”

“Aaanty Yuuu~!” The eyeless Nyoko turns toward the voice and calls out to the woman in the lab coat that’s reaching for a nearby cabinet to retrieve some document.

“Oooohhh you, such a cutie.” Temporarily forgetting her task, she reaches down into the cradle to give the smiling Nyoko a light pinch on the cheeks. Feeling the cool hands, the child giggles as she gropes the hands that are touching her face. “Let’s have lunch with aunty and mommy later, okay?”

“Ooookay~. Aanty, Bafuoolibfff bad, okay?”

The woman scrunches her brows in confusion before mumbling an “Okay”, and grabs her document before leaving the room.

“Batholith? Where did she learn that?” The confused researcher heads back down the hallway, still slightly confused.

[T/N: Batholith is a complex geological feature that produces large outcrops that “sheds” its outerlayer every once in a while, making smooth, round surfaces. A famous one is the Halfdome in Yosemite Park in the US.]

\* \* \* \* \*

“Okay, Nyoko, slowly open your eyes.” A man with a confident voice fills the room.

“Ahh!”

“Xin Yue, lower the light a bit more.”

“Come on, honey, try again.”

“Okay, mommy.”

About a dozen people are gathered into the room, the luminous fluorescent light in the ceiling is dimmed to the point that everything is covered by shadow. A young Nyoko is sitting on a white medical bed with gauze draping over her shoulders.

“Mommy...?” The child reaches toward a faint shadow within her new

found vision.

\*uuuu\*

The woman suddenly reaches over and hugs her daughter, tears of joy streaking down her face.

“Wooo!”

“Conrgratulations!”

“ALLLRIGHT!”

The room fills with raucous cheering as Nyoko confirms that she can indeed see everyone. The researchers and medical staff are cheering along with the mother and daughter pair.

“Thank you, Yue, Hector, everyone.” Xin Xin rocks Nyoko back and forth in her arms, with medical techniques recovered from one of the artifacts Kentaro was researching, a way of returning sight to their daughter as well as a treatment method has been found.

“It is our pleasure. But she will still have to stay here for a while until she gets used to seeing again. We will implant the secondary and tertiary cornea layer once the optic nerves connect permanently to the implants. Things will be blurry for a while since we won’t install the lens until the after the secondary layer is set.” The man turns to the young child that’s now looking up at him with dark, hollow eyes, the mechanical iris slowly opens and closes silently as it tries to adjust to the light for the first time. “How are you feeling, Nyoko?”

“A little sore...” The girl looks down and tucks her face into her mother’s shoulder. “Thank you everyone.”

“Everyone, please welcome our new transfer student, Nyoko Yamashiro [?? ??].” A middle-aged elementary school teacher with her hair tied into a bun makes a nervous introduction to her class as Nyoko makes the short walk from the door to the front of the class in a yellow sundress, giving a bow. Silence fills the room for a few moments, causing Nyoko to look at the rest of her future classmates.

\*kusha kusha\*

The students start murmuring amongst themselves.

“My mom said her mother is the ‘Millennial Demon’ to be able to chase her dad away.”

“Eh, my dad said that her dad is the ‘Millennial Fraud’.”

“Did you guys see her eyes? It’s weird, it’s like a monster’s...”

\*pashi\*

\*pashi\* \*pashi\* \*pashi\*

The children start throwing crumpled pieces of paper, crayons, erasers and other things at Nyoko all of the sudden.

“Monster! Go away!”

“Go back to the zoo you freak!”

“Go hide in your castle, Yamashiro! Wait for a Hero to come defeat you!”

[T/N: That one took me a bit to figure out (although I spent a lot longer looking up her name :P). The wordplay here is ??, which means Mountain City or Mountain Castle. And villains were often

hidden inside some sort of castle, hence the rather weird insult. I couldn't think of an english equivalent]

"Class, calm down."

\*pashi\* \*pashi\*

Things are thrown at the teacher as well.

"Why did you bring a monster here?!"

"What a useless teacher!"

"Send her back!"

Nyoko grips her sundress tightly as she makes her way out of the classroom as the teacher uselessly tries to calm the classroom down.

...  
...  
...

"Just take a good rest okay, Nyoko? Mom has to get to work, so rest for the rest of the day, I made some jelly if you want to eat something to cool down a little." Xin reaches down towards her daughter's forehead, checking the temperature. "It's so hot... should mom skip work and stay home with you? Damn these kids and their parents, don't they teach them manners nowadays..." She angrily complains about the children after she hears about what happened, getting a call suddenly from the school right after dropping Nyoko off.

"No, it's okay mommy, go to work, I can take care of myself. I will call you or Uncle Hector if I feel any worse."

"Alright, be careful not to get chilled okay?"



“I will.”

Nyoko gives her mother a hug before quickly kissing her cheek while sitting on her bed. Feeling tired, the girl closes her eyelids and tries to sleep as Xin quietly leaves the room.

...

...

...

“So... boring...” The girl gets up after a few hours’ rest. Her feverish temperature returns to a more normal range, giving her a clearer mind. “Hm...?” She recalls the numerous books that line their bookshelves. With nothing better to do, she grabs a book randomly and proceeds to read it. Maybe it’s because she’s ignorant of the supposed ceiling in learning a child her age should have, she’s reading books that are at the university level. For words she doesn’t understand, she will grab the well-worn dictionary and look up its meaning. When she’s bored of reading, she would start looking at math problems, treating them as simple puzzles to be solved. As her conditions continue to be unstable, her days remaining at home are more than the time she spends at the new school she enrolled in, thus she spends more of her time entertaining herself with the collection of books in the apartment as well as the radio and crude technicolour television that adorns the living room.

\* \* \* \* \*

“Nyoko! Guess what?”

“What is it, mom?”

"This!" The woman holds up a lamp-like object while putting on a pair of dark glasses.

"What is this?" The girl looks at the objects with curiosity.

"It's graduation present from your dad!"

"Dad...?" Nyoko has no impression of such a person, but supposedly he's a genius and went somewhere to find a cure for her.

"Just sit down in your room, okay?" Xin gives her a peck on the forehead before heading off to Nyoko's bedroom within the 2 room apartment. Obediently, Nyoko follows.

...

"According to dad, once you use this for a while, your fevers should taper off."

"Oh? Then what's with your glasses?"

"Apparently I need to wear it otherwise the light will burn my eyes out. But you don't have to worry about that."

"Oh."

"By the way, your Uncle Hector successfully took over the Labs after kicking the previous owner out. That owner was up to some evil stuff." Xin makes a face of disgust. "So I'll be busy for a while to help sort things out. I will be helping Auntie Yue with the TIES project, so things might be a little crazy for the next few months."

"Then I should come and help you! It's not like I need to attend school

anyways...”

“No, you will have to attend school. But I don’t mind you coming to spend some time with me, I’m sure the aunties and uncles wouldn’t mind, but I’ll ask first, okay? Now just sit here for 30 minutes, then turn off the lamp afterward, got it?”

“Yes, mom.”

\* \* \* \* \*

“Hello, Auntie Yue!”

“Hello, sweetie!” The young-looking, middle-aged woman gives the cheerful girl a hug. “Are you ready to try this new system we developed?”

“Yep! That’s what I’m here for, where’s mum?”

“Hahaha, she’s already waiting for you! Don’t worry, we already tested it ourselves, unlike the last owner...” A menacing look flashes across her eyes before returning to normal.

...

“Eh... isn’t this the game system that caused several deaths, mom?” The girl looks at the large, bulky consoles sitting in the middle of the large windowless room filled with various machineries.

“Ah, that’s the version the previous owner tried to commercialize. We fixed it up, added a bunch of safety features and even trimmed a lot of the unnecessary equipment down. Soon, it would be nothing more than a console and a bed! Come on, honey! I can’t wait to show you

this place, it's like the forest where we used to stroll in, but many times more beautiful!"

Unable to resist her mother's smiling face full of excitement, Nyoko enters the machine for the first time with complicated feelings.

**Biometric registration complete. Would you like an avatar?**

